



STUDIES IN SPENSER



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WITH A FOREWORD

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Dedicated,

By kind permission,

To

The Honourable Sir George Claus Rankin, Kt.,

Chief Justice of Bengal,

In acknowledgment of his interest

in

The University of Calcutta



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## PREFACE

The present volume, with the exception of Chapter III, is a supplement to some theses submitted by me as a Premchand Roychand Research Student to the University of Calcutta. One of these was published in 1921 by the University in its Journal of the Department of Letters, Vol. II, under the heading "Platonism in Spenser." Chapter III of the present volume is based on one of the chapters of the latter. Other chapters of this volume embody the results of work done later as a University Lecturer in English and now appear in print for the first time.

The difficulty which an Indian must feel in writing on English Literature or Ancient Philosophy, has also been mine. Moreover, the materials and documents necessary for carrying on substantial work are not all available in Calcutta. It is only likely, therefore, that there should be shortcomings and defects in my work. My only excuse for having undertaken it is the supreme attraction of Platonic Philosophy.

I have to acknowledge my obligations to Dr. W. S. Urquhart, Vice-Chancellor of the Calcutta University for his kindly contributing the "Foreword."

CALCUTTA,  
February, 1929. }

M. M. BHATTACHERJE





## FOREWORD

TO

### STUDIES IN SPENSER

The writer of this little book has asked me to write a short foreword, and I accede to his request with great pleasure. He has provided a most interesting study of the influence of Platonic and Neo-Platonic ideas upon Spenser, and has worked out his theories with great skill. The first chapter shows how the Platonic conception of *Justice* receives concrete illustration in Spenser, and then in the second chapter our author passes to the fifteenth century and shows how the ideas of Plato have filtered through the writings of the Italian Pico Della Mirandola and have moulded the form of Spenser's *Hymnes of Love and Beautie*. In his theory of poetry also Spenser is shown to owe much to Plato. Almost in the words of Plato, the English poet describes poetry as "no arte, but a divine gift and heavenly instinct, not to be begotten by laboure and learning, but adorned with both." Bruno also, in so far as he is influenced by Neo-Platonism, is shown to have contributed much to the development of Spenser's thought. In a delightful concluding

chapter Mr. Bhattacharje analyses the mediaeval conception of courtesy, which he also takes to have been influenced by Platonism, and shows how this has entered into the Spenserian conception of the ideal of culture.

We look forward to the publication of the book and hope that it will attract the attention that it deserves.

W. S. URQUHART





# STUDIES IN SPENSER

## CHAPTER I

### JUSTICE

In Plato Justice is but another name of Temperance. It is a state of harmony in the soul produced by the balance of the three principles, *viz.*, Reason, Passion and Appetite. This is its definition in the *Phaedrus* where it is figured in the image of the charioteer (Reason) and the winged horses (Appetite and Passion). In the *Republic* this virtue is explained by reference to the state and the activities of its different members. Spenser deals with this virtue under the name of Temperance in the Second Book of the *Faerie Queene* where a number of characters and episodes illustrates this doctrine of harmony. It was only to be expected, when Spenser came to deal with Justice in the Fifth Book, that having exhausted its inner content, *viz.*, the idea of harmony in the soul in Book II, he would treat of the external manifestation of it in the state and that Book V would allegorise the Platonic conceptions





of perfect and imperfect forms of government.<sup>1</sup> But this expectation is not realised except to a very slight extent. It has accordingly been said that Book V of the *Faerie Queene* has no moral significance, that it has only a historical meaning and that it is a colourless and mediocre production.

While these charges are true to a certain extent, Spenser had an excuse for not introducing ancient political speculations into his poem. This is to be found in his letter to Sir Walter Raleigh where, in unfolding the plan of the *Faerie Queene*, he undertakes to deal in it only with the twelve moral virtues of Aristotle and expressly excludes political virtues from the scope of his poem. "I labour to pourtraict in Arthure, before he was king, the image of a brave Knight, perfected in the twelve private morall virtues, as Aristotile hath devised; the which is the purpose of these first twelve books : which if I finde to be well accepted, I may be perhaps encoraged to frame the other part of *polliticke virtues* in his person, after that he came to be King." The Legend of Justice (Book V), however, is not merely a historical narrative in disguise. Ancient ideas on Justice are found scattered throughout the poem, though the story as a whole is not regulated by them—in fact, it is not a connected story at all but only a string of episodes. These ancient ideas are mostly drawn from Aristotle's and Plato's philosophy

<sup>1</sup> Monarchy, Timocracy, Oligarchy, Democracy and Tyranny.



and lend colour to some of the characters. It must, however, be admitted that nowhere is the influence of Aristotle or Plato very marked.

Aristotle deals with Justice in Book V of his *Ethics* and he takes up the enquiry where Plato leaves it. Aristotle defines Justice as "a moral disposition," but the idea underlying this definition had been fully thought out and exhaustively analysed by Plato. According to Plato this disposition or temperance is the outcome of a balance of the three principles of the human soul. But Aristotle, without entering into the nature or the causes of this disposition, is content to believe that Justice is "a moral disposition such that in consequence of it men have the capacity of *doing* what is just, and *actually do it*, and wish it. Similarly also with respect to Injustice, it is a moral disposition such that in consequence of it men do unjustly, and wish what is unjust."

Aristotle is more concerned with the consideration of "what is Just" *in action*. It is his idea of practical Justice that has left its traces in Spenser; but this idea of Aristotle also had its origin in Plato. Justice in Aristotle has two meanings but it is its restricted sense with which he is concerned in his *Ethics*. In this sense, a just man is satisfied with his own dues—his own share of wealth or property, while the unjust man wants more than this. "The Just





will be the lawful and the *equal* and the unjust the unlawful and the *unequal*," "the equal" and "the unequal" standing for the contented and the grasping man respectively. This idea of the just man is present in Plato, though it is there only as a corollary to the theory of harmony in the soul. The idea is present not only in the tentative definitions of justice in the first book of the *Republic*, but also towards the end of the treatise where Socrates establishes his conception of justice after a good deal of wrangling with his audience. In Book I of the *Republic*, Socrates asks Thrasymachus, "Will you be so good as answer yet one more question? Does the just man try to gain any advantage over the unjust?"

"Far otherwise. If he did, he would not be the simple, amusing creature which he is!"

"And would he try to go beyond just action?"

"He would not."

"And how would he regard the attempt to gain an advantage over the unjust; would that be considered by him as just or unjust?"

"He would think it just, and would try to gain the advantage; but he would not be able."

Thrasymachus, for argument's sake, imputes to the just man a desire to rob others and points out that his innocence is due to his want of power. This idea is just the reverse of what Socrates proves towards the end of the *Republic*, viz., that it is the unjust man who tries to gain





an advantage over other people and to rob them, while the just man is contented with his own share. Of course, robbery is possible only by people whose souls have lost their harmony on which Plato is never weary of emphasising. But what has a subordinate place in Plato assumes great importance in Aristotle who fills his discourse on Justice with analyses and illustrations of the unjust action hinted at by Plato, *viz.*, misappropriation of other people's belongings.

Aristotle classifies Justice into two classes: Distributive and Corrective. Distributive Justice is concerned with the determination of the shares of partners in joint production, and these are proportionate to their respective contributions to the common or joint fund. Corrective Justice, on the other hand, comes in only when some grasping man has appropriated more than his share and the equilibrium has to be restored. This equilibrium is described by Aristotle as the "mean," "equal" or "just." The restoration of the equilibrium is effected by making over to the original owner the property of which he had been wrongfully deprived, *i.e.*, by restoring the *status quo ante*. If the two shares are originally equal and something is taken from the one and added to the other, the greater exceeds the less by twice the quantity which has been added to it. In this case, justice is done by adding half the present difference between





the two shares to the less. In the case of Corrective Justice there is no question of proportion, for whatever is wrongfully taken must be given back irrespective of the position or condition of the parties. "The Corrective Justice must be the mean between loss and gain...So it is the office of a judge to make things equal, and the line, as it were, having been unequally divided, he takes from the greater part that by which it exceeds the half, and adds this on to the less. And when the whole is divided into two exactly equal portions, then men say, they have their own, when they have gotten the equal, and the equal is a mean between the greater and the less, according to arithmetical equality."<sup>1</sup>

From this conception of Justice Aristotle derives his view of the nature and function of the Judge. Since the Judge is to execute justice, he must himself be just. He is equally removed from the extremes and is the follower of the *via media*. "Going to the judge is in fact going to the Just. And men seek a judge as one in the mean which is expressed in a name given by some to Judges, *Mesidioi*, or middlemen, under the notion that, if they can hit on the mean, they shall hit on the Just. The just is then surely a mean, since the Judge is also."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ethics*, Book V, Ch. VII.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*



Injustice caused by a "grasping man" which calls for the interference of Corrective Justice arises out of voluntary as well as involuntary transactions. Examples of the former class are selling, buying, use, bail, etc., and examples of the latter are theft, adultery, poisoning and false witness which "affect secrecy" and insult, death, bonds, plundering, maiming, foul language and slanderous abuse, which are "accompanied with open violence."<sup>1</sup>

Spenser in Book V follows Aristotle in giving instances of injustice. Artegall is the personification of Justice and the persons punished by him typify some of the forms of injustice mentioned above. Thus, Braggadocchio who is punished in Canto III is a thief, Pollente and Munera are plunderers,<sup>2</sup> Radigund, the Amazon Queen, is guilty of causing "bonds" or captivity, Adicia to whom Queen Mercilla sends Samient for carrying on negotiations<sup>3</sup> stands charged with "insulting" and using "foul language" against the messenger, Dolon attempts to assassinate Britomart,<sup>4</sup> while Sanglier actually murders his own lady and tries to kidnap the wife of the Squire.<sup>5</sup>

Illustrations of the Aristotelian conception of Justice "which is corrective in the various transactions between man and man" are also to be

<sup>1</sup> *Ethics*, Book V, Ch. V.

<sup>2</sup> Canto VIII.

<sup>3</sup> *F.Q.*, Canto II, Bk. V.

<sup>4</sup> Canto VI.

<sup>5</sup> Canto I.





found in Spenser. In Book V such justice is administered by the restoration of the portion of a man's property unlawfully seized by another, so as to bring back the original state of "equality." In Canto IV the episode of the two brothers furnishes an example. The two islands bequeathed to them by their father were originally equal, but a portion of one, the heritage of Bracidas was washed off and deposited as an accretion on the island of Amidas. The result was inequality or injustice, though here the author of the crime was the sea. Artegall, as the impersonation of Justice, administered Corrective Justice or restored the *status quo ante* by decreeing that the chest of treasure should belong to Bracidas, it being assumed that it was equal in value to the accretion on Amidas' island, since both arose out of the sea.

In Canto II, the Giant poses to be the administrator of Corrective Justice and though he is found out to be an impostor, his method of work is Aristofelian. He sees injustice and inequality in the wearing out of the land by the sea, in the swelling up of the earth's surface through the addition of masses of lifeless bodies to it and the intrusion of fire into the kingdom of air. With his huge balance he wants to weigh the exact loss caused, and Justice or equality is to be established by the restoration to the loser of the things taken away from it.





The Giant tells Artegall :—

“ The sea itselfe doest thou not plainely see  
Encroch uppon the land there under thee;  
And th’ earth itselfe how daily its increast,  
By all that dying to it turned be ? ”

Therefore he says :—

“ — I will throw downe these mountains hie,  
And make them levell with the lowly plaine,  
These towring rocks, which reach unto the skie,  
I will thrust downe into the deepest maine  
And as they were, them equalise againe.”

According to the Giant there is injustice in the relative conditions of the rich and the poor, the “ Lordlings ” and the “ Commons,” for the upper classes are, according to him, so many vampires sucking out the life-blood of the lower. He, therefore, wants to make an equal division of wealth amongst the rich and the poor. He says :—

“ Tyrants that make men subject to their law,  
I will suppress, that they no more may raine;  
And Lordlings curbe, that Commons overaw;  
And all the wealth of rich men to the poore will draw.”

Some have read into this speech principles similar to those that underlay the French Revolution, while others have found its source in the

<sup>1</sup> *F. Q.*, Bk. V, C. II, st. XXXVII.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, st. XXXVIII.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*





Anabaptist Theory of Equality. But Spenser's debt to the Aristotelian conception of Corrective Justice is clear from the arguments of the Giant on the equalisation of wealth and encroachment on other people's property and from his use of the word "Justice."

As pointed out above, Aristotle thinks that "upon a dispute arising, men have recourse to the Judge... And men seek a Judge as one in the mean." Such a Judge is Spenser's Artegall. He had been asked to decide cases of dispute more than once, *e.g.*, between Amidas and Bracidas, Guyon and Braggadocchio, while he was the champion of Justice in a number of episodes. He was trained up by Astraea to act as an umpire or a middleman and the whole of his youth was spent in receiving this training and demonstrating its practical usefulness amongst beasts of the forest.

Plato gives pre-eminence to Justice as the greatest of virtues which helps on the growth of other virtues.<sup>1</sup> Aristotle says of Justice, 'in a broad sense,' "This Justice is, in fact, Perfect virtue. Yet not simply so, but as exercised towards one's neighbour; and for this reason Justice is thought oftentimes to be the best of the virtues." Spenser has the same notion about the superiority of Justice over other virtues.





" *Most sacred virtue she of all the rest,  
Resembling God in his imperiall might; "*

He laments that the reign of this supreme virtue is a thing of the past, it having flourished on this earth only during the reign of Saturn.

Over and above Aristotle's practical applications of Platonic ideas, direct traces of Plato's conception of Justice are to be found in Book V of the *Faerie Queene*. Artegall is the impersonation of Justice and his adventure is undertaken to punish Grantorto who is described as a tyrant. Another antagonist of Artegall, whom he encounters in the course of his journey, is similarly described. Radigund is a tyranness. Prince Arthur represents in every book of the *Faerie Queene* the specific virtue allegorised in it and, therefore, in Book V he stands for Justice. His antagonist Gerioneo is also called a tyrant. Now it is Plato who in his *Republic* sets up Tyranny as the opposite of Justice. Platonic Justice is the consummation of virtue, while Tyranny in Plato is the worst vice.

Plato distinguishes tyranny in the temperament of man from tyranny in the state: the tyrannical man from the tyrannical ruler. The tyrannical ruler is the product of love of extreme liberty on the part of the people. The tyrant panders to their vices and, having thus gained power, satisfies his own hidden desire. The lovers of license or extreme liberty then





become so many slaves ready to do anything at the bidding of the tyrant who "has a mob entirely at his disposal."<sup>1</sup> Tyranny in the state is thus the direct outcome of Democracy. In a Democracy people enjoy the utmost license and do away with vested rights. They kill or banish rich men and divide their wealth equally amongst themselves, grasp the sovereign power and use it recklessly. "Democracy comes into being after *the poor have conquered their opponents*, slaughtering some and banishing some, while to the remainder they give an *equal share of freedom and power*."<sup>2</sup> The Democrats are led by demagogues who urge them on to *wreck and destroy* old institutions by holding up before them a glorious vision of equality and liberty. Referring to demagogues, Plato says, "In a democracy they are almost the entire ruling power, and while the keener sort speak and act, the rest keep buzzing about the bema and do not suffer a word to be said on the other side ; hence in democracies almost everything is managed by the drones."<sup>3</sup> Spenser has some episodes based on these ideas of Plato. Spoliation of the rich, equal distribution of wealth and emancipation of the people are the task to which the Giant, in Canto II, sets himself.

<sup>1</sup> *Republic*, Book VIII.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*



“ Tyrants that make men subject to their law,  
I will suppress, that they no more may raine;  
And Lordlings curbe, that Commons overaw;  
And all the wealth of rich men to the poore  
will draw.”

But he was only the demagogue behind whom stood a great mob.

“ Therefore the vulgar did about him flocke,  
And cluster thicke unto his leasings vaine,  
Like foolish flies about an hony crocke;  
In hope by him great benefite to gaine,  
And uncontrolled freedome to obtaine.”<sup>1</sup>

When the Giant was thrown into the sea, this mob, baulked of its hope of gain, tried to cause disorder in the state.

“ They gan to gather in tumultuous rout,  
And mutining, to stirre up civill faction,  
For certaine losse of so great expectation;  
For well they hoped to have got great good,  
And wondrous riches by his innovation.”<sup>2</sup>

Spenser also notes the state of slavishness and stupidity to which a tyrant's rule reduces the citizens of a state. When Artegall killed Grantorto, some people who apparently felt the sting of tyranny hailed his victory with applause. But there were others who had sided with the tyrant and who “ did late maintayne that Tyrant's

<sup>1</sup> F. Q., Bk. V, C. II, st. XXXIII.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, st. LI.





part, with close or open ayde." These were punished by Artegall. Similarly there was a "warlike rout" which supported the tyranny of the Souldan and Adicia (Canto VIII, st. L). Spenser describes these people always as a vulgar, stupid lot, devoid of intelligence and a sense of decency. It is true that the Elizabethans always looked upon the Nobility as the sole repository of culture and sense and regarded the common people as boorish and dull. Spenser's ideas on this point might have been influenced by the current opinions to a certain extent; still in the legend of Justice the influence of Plato in these matters must not be lost sight of.

Plato says that the Tyrant first poses to be the *protector of the people* but when he is entrusted with power, he ruins those whom he had promised to protect against danger. "The people have always some champion whom they set over them and nurse into greatness. When he first appears above ground, he is a protector. He is not restrained from shedding the blood of kinsmen; by the favorite method of false accusation he brings them into Court and murders them, making the life of man to disappear, and with unholy tongue and lips tasting the blood of his fellow citizens; some he kills and others he banishes....."



The portrait of Gerioneo exactly fits in with this description. When Belge first became a widow, he offered himself as her guardian and protector and then usurped her kingdom and procured the death of her children.<sup>1</sup>

The most important characteristic of Platonic Justice is harmony, while tumult is the mark of injustice. The tyrannical or the extremely unjust man is described in Book II of the *Republic*. Incontinence is the law of his being. He is ever passing through an orgy of lewdness and dissolute pleasure for which money is always necessary. And for money he is ready to "cheat and deceive," to "use force," to "plunder" and to commit the grossest "treachery." Most of these vices are to be noticed in the character of Duessa in Canto IX of the Fifth Book. She stands charged with all the offences mentioned by Plato—"guile," treachery, deceit, adultery and incontinence of life and is the personification of the wildest and most tumultuous mental state darkened by passion and vice.

"Then brought he forth, with griesly grim aspect,  
Abhorred Murder, who with bloudie knyfe  
Yet dropping fresh in hand did her detect,  
And there with guiltie bloudshed charged ryfe:  
Then brought he forth Sedition, breeding stryfe  
In troublous wits, and mutinous uprore:  
Then brought he forth Incontinence of lyfe,

<sup>1</sup> Bk. V, Canto X, st. XIII.





Even foule Adulterie her face before,  
And lewd Impietie, that her accused sore."<sup>1</sup>

This picture has to be contrasted with that of Mercilla who in opposition to Duessa is the personification of Justice. She is reserved and dignified, calm and peaceful. Her mind being unruffled by excitement or tumult of any kind, she can deal even-handed justice to all. Her court is only a visible reflection of her internal being. Awe and Order are the two guards who preserve order in it. The ladies that are in attendance upon her are Dice, Eunomie, Eirene, Reverence and, last but not least, Temperance.

Glaucon says in Book II of the *Republic* that Justice is the interest of the "strongest" and he means that immorality or wickedness can assert itself by means of sheer brute force against temperance and goodness. Socrates shows that an intemperate (*i.e.*, unjust) man is weak inwardly. His mental faculties being disobedient to reason, he cannot concentrate his powers and exert them effectively, just as a nation divided against itself cannot hold the field against a united enemy. Hence intemperate and undisciplined strength is represented in Plato by "a multitudinous, many-headed monster, having a ring of heads of all manner of beasts, tame and wild."<sup>2</sup> It has no real courage and no discretion.

<sup>1</sup> Canto IX, st. XLVIII.

<sup>2</sup> *Republic*, Bk. IX.





Following Plato, Spenser makes his tyrants giants of physical strength. Gerioneo is actually a giant by descent and has "three double hands thrice multiplyde." Grantorto is also described as a giant "of stature huge." The Souldan, too, possesses inordinate strength. All of them fight recklessly and are defeated by the disciplined valour of men whose physical strength was decidedly inferior to theirs.

In Book II of the *Republic*, Glaucon describes in his own way what he believes to be the fate of the really just man. According to him, a prudent man ought to seem just and not to be just ; for a show of justice will bring him honour and injustice in practice will yield him profit. But the truly just man who cannot make a parade of his sense of justice can have neither pecuniary gain nor the respect of his neighbours. On the contrary, "The Just man who is thought unjust will be scourged, racked, bound—will have his eyes burnt out ; and at last, after suffering every kind of evil, he will be impaled,"<sup>1</sup> Spenser was impressed by the fate of the really just man as portrayed by Glaucon. Virtue is not always rewarded in this world and Spenser felt keenly the futility of human attempt to reward the meritorious and the deserving. This note of despondency is struck at the very beginning of the Fifth Book where Justice or Astraea is said to have left the world in disgust

<sup>1</sup> *Republic*, Book II.





because the golden age had ended. Spenser's dissatisfaction is further symbolised in the fate of Artegall. The champion of Justice on his return from his adventure is assailed by the hags Envy and Detraction. Foul slander and threat of harm are his reward. His fate thus resembles that of the really Just man as depicted by Plato.

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## CHAPTER II.

### SPENSER AND PICO DELLA MIRANDOLA.

Pico Della Mirandola was one of the most romantic figures of Italy in the 15th Century. He was also interesting as representing the spirit of the Revival of Learning in Italy at that period. Prominent in the Platonic Academy of Florence, he was fired with a zeal for knowledge and his dream was to form a synthesis of all branches of learning. He drank deep at the fountains of Scholasticism, Neo-Platonism and Jewish Cabbalism and attempted to reconcile Aristotle and Plato. But it was only his Neo-Platonism which attracted subsequent generations of whom not the least distinguished was the English poet Spenser.

The most important production of Pico was his commentary on Benivieni's *Hymn of Heavenly Love* (called *A Platonic Discourse upon Love*) published in 1487 along with the latter which, however, had been written earlier. By this time the creed of Plato and the Neo-Platonists had, through the endeavours of Marsilio Ficinus, become familiar to the enlightened people of Italy. The visit of Georgius Gemistus, the octogenarian Greek scholar, to Florence in 1439 and his lectures on Plato inspired a little later Cosimo de'





Medici to create in Florence a Platonic Academy on the model of that which had existed in Athens. Marsilio's translation of Plato had been finished in 1477 and he undertook the translation of Plotinus about the same time. His commentary on the *Symposium* was written earlier still (circ. 1470) and when in 1479 Pico first contracted the friendship of Benivieni at a social gathering in the Medician palace in Florence, the bond of amity was furnished by a discussion on the Platonic themes of Love and Beauty as interpreted by Ficinus in the light of Neo-Platonism.<sup>1</sup> Benivieni himself describes his *Hymn* as an attempt to sum up in a few verses what Marsilio Ficinus had described at length in his commentary on the *Symposium* of Plato.

Probably Pico's commentary had its origin in his friendship with Benivieni and in their discussion on Ficinus' presentation of Platonic and Neo-Platonic philosophy. But Pico never mentions Ficinus in his *Discourse*, though, as shown by a reference to dates, Ficinus' commentaries had become well-known to learned circles in Italy by the time when Pico wrote. The probable explanation of Pico's silence about Ficinus is that the conceptions of love and beauty issuing out of the Academy where Ficinus worked had become well-known in the polished circles of Florence as

<sup>1</sup> Gardner's Introduction to Pico's *Discourse*.





## SPENSER AND PICO DELLA MIRANDOLA 21

the philosophy of Plato and Ficinus had sunk into the background. Ficinus wrote as an annotator. He commented, as the title of his work on the *Symposium* shows (the title is *Commentarium in Convivium*), on the passages of Plato and his method of work with regard to the *Enneads* was the same. The unconnected remarks of Ficinus were probably quoted by people as Plato's ideas without any true appreciation of their meaning and bearing. Pico set himself to the task of formulating a consistent philosophy of Love and Beauty, tracing its creeds as far back as Plotinus and Plato and utilising the known interpretation when necessary. Hence it is that his actual commentary on Benivieni occupies a minor position in the *Discourse* and it is altogether separate from the main essay.

As mentioned above, Benivieni's *Hymn* was published along with Pico's commentary in the same volume and it is difficult, if not altogether impossible, to grasp its significance clearly without Pico's explanation. As the influence of Benivieni's *Hymn*<sup>1</sup> on Spenser is clear, it is very likely that Spenser should have been familiar with Pico in the original. Professor Elton writing on Bruno and the probability of Spenser's debt to him, says, "Both of them drew from the same sources of Neo-Platonism—partly from Plato

<sup>1</sup> See the *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, Vol. 13.





himself or Plotinus, but more immediately from the recognised exposition by Ficinus, Pico and Benivieni.' ' In his note on this passage, he distinctly refers to Benivieni's *Hymn* and Pico's commentary on it as the origins of English Neo-Platonism.

Pico's *Discourse* has much in common with the philosophy underlying the Hymns of Spenser. This is due to the fact that both are inspired by mysticism which can be traced up to its distant source in Plato and Plotinus. According to Pico everything has a threefold being—causal, formal and participated. "In the sun there is no heat, that being but an elementary quality, not of celestial nature. Yet is the sun the cause and fountain of all heat. Fire is hot by nature, and its proper form ; wood is not hot of itself, yet is capable of receiving that quality by fire. Thus hath heat its causal being in the sun, its formal in the fire, its participated in the Fuel." On this principle, Divine Excellence or Divinity has also a threefold being, *i.e.*, it has three different sorts of existence under three different conditions. "Above.....is God himself.....in whom Divinity hath a causal being : from whom proceeding to Angels it hath a formal being, and thence is derived into the rational Soul by participation of their lustre : below which no





nature can assume the title of divine."<sup>1</sup> "Ideas have their Causal being in God, their formal in the first Minde, their participated in the rational soul. In God they are not, but produced by Him in the Angelick nature, through this communicated to the soul."<sup>2</sup> The soul has two functions—sensitive and rational, as it is itself composed of sense and reason. Intellect, as symbolised by the Mind, is purely rational without any taint of sense, while Divinity in God transcends even Reason. The soul is in man the battle-ground of appetitive and rational faculties and the former very often overcome the latter whose function is thereupon suspended. But the Intellect or Reason is above appetite and always contemplates the effluence of Divinity on itself.

The origin of beauty is God who imparts it to other creatures. The first Mind or the Angelic Nature receives its beauty from God direct and in its turn communicates it to the Soul which, again, communicates it to material objects or body. Beauty, therefore, is but another name of Idea or Divinity which, issuing out of its Primal Source, informs everything else.

Again, beauty according to Pico is also a species of good and desire is an inclination to real or apparent good. As there are diverse kinds of good or beauty, so there are also of desire. The highest

<sup>1</sup> Pico's *Platonic Discourse upon Love*, Book I, Sec. II.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*





good which is at the root of other kinds of good is Divine Beauty ; the next is the beauty of Intellect and last in the scale is physical beauty. All creatures " desire God, as being the original good imprinted and participated in every particular," want to participate in Divinity and " have a particular perfection by participation of the Divine goodness. This is their end, including that degree of felicity whereof they are capable."<sup>1</sup>

The desire for beauty or good is love and as there are various grades of beauty or of good, so there are various kinds of love. " As from God Ideas descend into the Angelick Minde, by which the love of Intellectual Beauty is begot in her, called Divine Love ; so the same Ideas descend from the Angelick Minde into the rational soul so much the more imperfect in her, as she wants of Angelicall Perfection. From these springs Humane Love." But there is a lower type of love called vulgar love which is attached to gross matter and merely desires contact with it. This is a characteristic of beasts or " souls immerst in matter, and overcome by it or at least hindered by perturbations and passions." Human love has two types : it desires not contact with matter but sensible beauty ; it is also capable of rising superior to the impressions of sense altogether and then human love is gradually transformed into celestial love. " As when the Ideas

<sup>1</sup> Pico, Bk. II, Sec. I.





descend into the Minde, there ariseth a desire of enjoying that from whence this Ideal Beauty comes; so when the species of sensible Beauty flow into the eye, there springs a twofold Appetite of union with that whence this Beauty is derived, one sensuall, the other rational; the Principles of Bestial and Humane Love. If we follow sense, we judge the body wherein we behold this Beauty, to be its fountain.... This is the love of irrational creatures. But Reason knows that the body is so far from being its Original, that it is destructive to it, and the more it is sever'd from the body, the more it enjoys its own Nature and Dignity: we must not fix with the species of sense, in the body; but refine that species from all reliques of corporeal infection. And because man may be understood by the Rational Soul, either considered apart, or in its union to the body; in the first sense, Humane Love is the image of the Celestial; in the second, desire of sensible beauty; this being by the soul abstracted from matter, and made intellectual. The greater part of men reach no higher than this; others more perfect, remembering that more perfect beauty which the soul (before immerst in the Body) beheld, are inflamed with an incredible desire of reviewing it, in pursuit whereof they separate themselves as much as possible from the body, of which the soul (returning to its first Dignity) becomes absolute mistress. This is the image of Celestial Love, by





which man ariseth from one perfection to another, till his soul (wholly united with the Intellect) is made an Angel. Purged from material dross and transformed into spiritual flame by this Divine Power, he mounts up to Intelligible Heaven, and happily rests in his Father's bosome."<sup>1</sup>

The *Hymnes* of Spenser, though the last two have a Christian colouring, bear a sort of family likeness to these ideas. The difference between vulgar love and human love which lifts the soul up to the spiritual plane—between vulgar Venus and Celestial Venus—is noticeable both in the earlier and the later *Hymnes*. In the *Hymne of Heavenly Love*, Spenser warns men against "base affection" which stands in the way of the realisation of Heavenly Love. The gradual progress of the soul from human love to Celestial Love through separate stages furnishes the subject-matter of the *Fowre Hymnes* as a whole.

Again, certain Platonic ideas referred to in Pico, e.g., the connection between Plenty and Penury, Venus being the mother of Love who is the eldest as also the youngest of the gods (as explained by Ficinus), etc., are reproduced in Spenser<sup>2</sup> without any alteration. The mystic creed of communion with God and the merging of the soul in Him is the most important part of Neo-Platonic philosophy and, for the

<sup>1</sup> Pico, Bk. II, sec. xx.

<sup>2</sup> H. L. st. VIII.





matter of that, of Pico's system. This transformation is described by Plotinus as ecstasy of the soul. Though Spenser shrinks from communion with God, he describes in his last *Hymne* the purification and spiritualisation of the soul in the presence of that "Soveraine Light" or Sapience, the beloved of God. In the *Hymne of Heavenly Beautie*, Spenser describes the various grades of physical beauty side by side with those of spiritual beauty. The beauty of Angels, Powers and Dominations pales before the glory of Sapience. The *Hymne in honour of Beautie* describes how beauty is transmitted from "the great immortall Spright" to the soul and thence to human body.

But apart from this vague and general resemblance between Pico and Spenser which, for reasons mentioned above, was inevitable, there are some points in Spenser's conception of love and beauty for which the poet must have been especially the debtor of this Italian Neo-Platonist. It has been mentioned that beauty, like love, has more than one type--the lowest type being sensible beauty and the highest the beauty of God. In a well-known passage in the *Symposium*, Diotima explains how the soul rises from an apprehension of the lowest to the realisation of the highest type through successive stages. Benivieni's *Hymn*, too, describes the ascent of the soul through





different stages, but Pico's commentary on stanzas VI, VII and VIII of Benivieni's *Hymn* definitely enumerates those stages as six and rigidly defines the nature and character of each of them. Pico shows how each is finer and more spiritual than the one just below it. "From Material Beauty we ascend to the first Fountain by six Degrees: the Soul through the sight represents to herself the Beauty of some particular Person, inclines to it, is pleased with it, and while she rests here, is in the first, the most imperfect material degree. (2) She reforms by her imagination the Image she hath received, making it more perfect as more spiritual; and separating it from Matter, brings it a little nearer Ideal Beauty. (3) By the light of the agent Intellect abstracting this Form from all singularity, she considers the universal Nature of Corporal Beauty by itself: this is the highest degree the soul can reach whilst she goes no further than sense. (4) Reflecting upon her own operation, the knowledge of universal Beauty, and considering that every thing founded in Matter is particular, she concludes this universality proceeds not from the outward Object, but her Intrinsic Power: and reasons thus: If in the dimme Glasse of Material Phantasmes this Beauty is represented by vertue of my Light, it follows that, beholding it in the clear Mirrour of my substance devested of those clouds, it will appear more perspicuous: thus turning into herself,





she findes the Image of Ideal Beauty communicated to her by the Intellect, the Object of Celestiall Love. (5) She ascends from this Idea in herself, to the place where Celestial Venus is, in her proper form : who in fullness of her Beauty not being comprehensible, by any particular Intellect, she, as much as in her lies, endeavours to be united to the first Minde, the chiefest of Creatures, and general Habitation of Ideal Beauty. Obtaining this, she terminates and fixeth her journey ; this is the sixth and last degree.'''<sup>1</sup> Beauty of a single woman, idealised beauty of the same, beauty of womankind or womanly charm in general, beauty as part of one's own mind, universal intellectual beauty and beauty of God—these are the six stages of Pico.

In Spenser's *Hymnes*, the stages of beauty through which the soul makes its upward journey, are more clearly marked and more sharply differentiated from one another than in the speech of Diotima. The progress of the soul, so vaguely described in Plato, is also more clearly defined in Spenser and, in fact, all the six stages mentioned by Pico are to be found in his *Hymnes*. The first two stages in Pico form the subject-matter of Spenser's first hymn, the *Hymne in honour of Love* and the next two that of his second hymn, the *Hymne in honour of Beautie*. How the beauty of a woman leads a man to idealise it, is described

<sup>1</sup> Pico's Discourse, Bk. III, Commentary on sts. VI.-VIII.





in stanza 28 of the *Hymne in honour of Love*. Abstract womanly grace is referred to in stanza 31 of the second *Hymne* of Spenser, while the fourth stage or Beauty as part of one's own mind is portrayed in the next stanza. A treatment of the fifth and sixth stages with some modifications is to be found in the 3rd and 4th *Hymnes* respectively, notwithstanding their marked Christian colouring. Universal Beauty or Beauty as a purely intellectual conception comes in the last stanza of the *Hymne of Heavenly Love* where the poet speaks of the "Idee of his pure glorie" and the last stage, *i.e.*, the beauty of God's glory is hinted at in the *Hymne of Heavenly Beautie*.

There is a passage in the *Cortegiano* of Castiglione which is in substance the same as the passage from Pico quoted above. There also six distinct stages of the lover's ascent are given and they coincide exactly with the stages in Pico. The definition and demarcation of the stages are also similar. This has led some writers to hold that Spenser was indebted to Castiglione for his ideas regarding the progress of the lover's journey in his *Hymnes* and its different stages.<sup>1</sup> Probably they had no opportunity of examining Pico's work. Pico flourished before Castiglione and his work also was published, along with Benivieni's *Hymn*, earlier than the *Cortegiano*.

<sup>1</sup> See the *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, Vol. 13.





It is thus very likely that Castiglione should have borrowed his ideas of love from the celebrated treatise of Pico which, along with Benivieni's *Hymn* was, "from the standpoint of literature, the most interesting production of the school of Marsilio Ficinus." Benivieni was the first of the Italian Neo-Platonists to handle poetically the theme of the progressive realisation of Divine Love by human soul and there is considerable resemblance between his *Hymn* and Spenser's *Fowre Hymnes*. In Benivieni, however, the number of stages of ascent is not six which number was first fixed by Pico in his commentary. It is thus highly probable that Spenser should have been a debtor of Pico and Benivieni rather than of Castiglione in this respect.

Spenser's conception of beauty is also similar to that of Pico and in some places his very language seems to have been borrowed from this Italian Neo-Platonist. Pico says that beauty depends not only on form and symmetry but on an inexplicable element which he terms gracefulness. "Corporeal beauty implyes, first the material disposition of the Body, consisting of quantity in the proportion and distance of parts, of quality in figure and colour: secondly, a certain quality which cannot be exprest by any term better than Gracefulness, shining in all that is fair. This is properly Venus, Beauty, which kindles the fire of Love in Mankinde: they who affirm it results





from the disposition of the Body, the sight, figure, and colour of features, are easily confuted by experience. We see many persons exact and unaccusable in every part, destitute of this grace, and comeliness, others lesse perfect in those particular conditions, excellently graceful and comely; thus Catullus,

' Many think Quintia beautiful; fair and tall,  
And strait she is, a part I grant her all,  
But altogether beautiful I deny;  
For not one grace doth that large shape supply.'

He grants her Perfection of Quality, Figure, and Quantity, yet not allows her handsome, as wanting this Grace. This then must by consequence be ascribed to the Soul; which when perfect and lucid, transfuseth even into the Body some Beams of its Splendour." Exactly corresponding to this passage, there are some stanzas, commencing with the following lines, in Spenser's *Hymne in honour of Beautie* :—

" How vainely then doe ydle wits invent,  
That beautie is nought else but mixture made  
Of colours faire, and goodly temp'rament  
Of pure complexions, that shall quickly fade  
And passe away, like to a sommers shade;  
Or that it is but comely composition  
Of parts well measured, with meet disposition! "

Spenser's ideas correspond not only to the prose dissertation of Pico but also to the spirit of the verse from Catullus which the latter quotes.





Pico explains at length the process by which beauty is imparted to human body. According to him, God scatters souls on the planets—"some in the Moon, others in other Planets and Stars." The nature of the soul varies according to the planet on which it is cast. Says Pico, "Platonists affirm some Souls are of the nature of Saturn, others of Jupiter or some other planet; meaning one Soul hath more conformity in its Nature with the Soul of the Heaven of Saturn, than with that of Jupiter, and so on the contrary." The souls come down from the planets and are linked to bodies to which they impart their own beauty as well as their disposition. From the looks of a man it is possible to know his temper and his morals. "Many imagine the Rational Soul descending from her Star, in her '*Vehiculum Coeleste*,' of herself forms the Body, to which by that Medium she is united. Our author upon these grounds, supposeth, that into the '*Vehiculum*' of the Soul, by her endued with Power to form the Body, is infused from her Star a particular formative vertue, distinct according to that Star; thus the aspect of one is Saturnine, of another Jovial, etc. In their looks we reade the nature of their Souls" <sup>1</sup>

Spenser follows Pico in suggesting that souls come down from planets where they return after the dissolution of human body and, further, that

<sup>1</sup> Pico's *Discourse*, Commentary on sta. VII, VIII.





the quality of the soul is expressed in human aspect and physiognomy. He says,

“ —when the soule, the which derived was,  
 • At first, out of that great immortall Spright,  
 By whom all live to love, whilome *did pas*  
*Downe from the top of purest heavens hight*  
 To be embodied here, it then tooke light  
 And lively spirits from that fayrest starre  
 Which lights the world forth from his fire carre.

Which powre retayning still or more or lesse,  
 When she in fleshly seede is eft enraced,  
 Through every part she doth the same impresse,  
 According as the heavens have her graced—

...                      ...                      ...  
 For all that faire is, is by nature good;  
 That is a signe to know the gentle blood.”<sup>1</sup>

In a later stanza Spenser gives the same explanation as Pico as to why good and beautiful souls are found in ugly bodies, *viz.*, that matter is not always subject to the plastic influence of spirit.<sup>1</sup> Where the formative action of the souls is baffled by the extreme grossness of matter, we come across deformed creatures; but similar souls, if they are more fortunate in their material garb, appear clothed in beautiful bodies. Pico says on this point, “Because inferior matter is not ever obedient to the Stamp, the vertue of the Soul is not alwayes equally exprest in the visible Effigies; hence it happens that two of the same nature are unlike; the

<sup>1</sup> *Hymne in honour of Beautie, stas. XVI-XX.*





matter whereof the one consists, being lesse disposed to receive that figure than the other ; what in that is compleat is in this imperfect." It is, however, true that the germ of the ideas here elaborated by Pico lay in Ficinus. But Ficinus only preached the current mediæval belief that every person was born under the influence of some planet and his life and temperament were accordingly influenced by it. Pico tries to raise this belief to the level of a philosophical principle. The world, according to him, has a soul which manifests itself in three ways according as it animates the "subterranean, the sublunary and the celestial" parts. "Next that of the world, Platonists assigne many other rational souls. The eight principal are those of the heavenly spheres; which according to their opinion exceeded not that number ; consisting of the seven Planets and the starry Orb." <sup>1</sup> Besides these there are rational souls in the moon and in the stars. Pico suggests not only that people are born under the influence of stars and planets but that souls actually come down from planets in a "*Vehiculum Coeleste*."

Souls that descend in a "*Vehiculum Coeleste*" from the same planet have the same nature—they have the same temperament—mercurial, saturnine or jovial. Hence though their physical bodies may look totally different, they feel an attraction for each other and true love is possible

<sup>1</sup> Pico's *Discourse*, Bk. I, x.





between such souls only. Pico says, "It happens that two of the same nature are unlike; the matter whereof the one consists being less disposed to receive that figure than the other; what in that is complete is in this imperfect.....Our author infers that the figures of the two bodies being formed by *virtue of the star, this conformity begets love.*" Spenser embodies this theory of love between souls having the same planetary origin in the following verses:—

"—Love is a celestiall harmonie  
Of likely harts composd of starres concent,  
Which joyne together in sweete sympathie,  
To worke ech others joy and true content,  
Which they have harboured since *their first descent*  
*Out of their heavenly bowres, where they did see*  
And know ech other here belov'd to bee."

It is well-known that an attempt was made in the 15th century to harmonise Greek philosophy with Christian Theology. Ficinus was one of the first to set himself to this task. He explained the Trichotomy of Plotinus as the three persons of the Christian Trinity. Pico followed in the footsteps of Ficinus and made a somewhat similar attempt to reconcile Neo-Platonism with Christianity. While identifying God with the Good or the One, the First in the Neo-Platonic Hierarchy, Pico identifies not the *Son* (as Ficinus did) but what he calls the





First Mind with the Intellect or the second hypostasis of the Neo-Platonists. "That the first of these three Natures cannot be multiplied, who is but one, the principle and cause of all other Divinity, is evidently proved by Platonists, Peripateticks, and our Divines. About the second, (*viz.*) the Angelick and Intellectual, Platonists disagree. Some betwixt God and the rational Soul place a great number of creatures ; part of these they call Intelligible ; part Intellectual.....The most refined Platonists, betwixt God and the Soul of the World assigne onely one creature which they call the Son of God, because immediately produced by him....." But he goes on : " We therefore according to the opinion of Plotinus confirmed not onely by the best Platonists, but even by Aristotle and all the Arabians, especially Avicenna, affirm, that God from eternity produced a creature of incorporeal and intellectual nature, as perfect as is possible for a created being, beyond which he produced nothing ; for of the most perfect cause the effect must be most perfect : and the most perfect can be but one..... We conclude, therefore, that no creature but this First Minde proceeds immediately from God : for of all other effects issuing from this minde, and all other second causes, God is onely the mediate efficient. This by Plato, Hermes, and Zoroaster is called the Daughter of God, the Minde, Wisdom, Divine Reason, by some interpreted the





Word : not meaning (with our Divines) *the Son of God, he not being* a creature, but one essence co-equal with the creator."<sup>1</sup> It will be seen that, unlike Ficinus, Pico leaves the Christian Trinity untouched and does not try to split it into three distinct entities and to identify them with the different Neo-Platonic emanations. Pico thus does not abandon the orthodox position. Spenser's *Hymne of Heavenly Love* bears traces of this attempt at a reconciliation between Christianity and Neo-Platonism. But the poet is not consistent in his treatment of the topic. He derives the Son (as well as the "third" "spright") from the "High Eternall Powre" in the manner of Ficinus ;<sup>2</sup> but he also describes Him as being co-equal with the latter, as Calvin and Pico had done.<sup>3</sup> He differs from Pico in bringing Godhead into closer touch with the creation. In Spenser God creates a large number of Angels<sup>4</sup> and men too, but Pico holds that only one perfect Being can be created by God, the Source of Perfection. This is the Mind or Wisdom ; of "all other effects issuing from this minde and all other Second Causes, God is onely the mediate efficient."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Pico's *Discourse*, Bk. I. iv.

<sup>2</sup> *H. H. L.* st. y.

<sup>3</sup> *H. H. L.* st. VI.

<sup>4</sup> *H. H. L.* sts. VIII, XVI.

<sup>5</sup> Pico's *Discourse*, Bk. I. iv.





## CHAPTER III.

### THEORY OF POETRY.

English Literary Criticism was in its infancy in the Elizabethan Age. Its theory of poetry arose out of controversy and aimed chiefly at the moral defence of poetry, while it included within its scope rhetoric as well as philology. It was not of purely indigenous growth. Aristotle and Horace, Italian and French criticism, both Latin and vernacular, of the 16th century were freely drawn upon by Elizabethan critics. In discussions on rhetoric, the influence of Cicero is noticeable. But Plato was referred to only by purists like Gosson in support of censorship of poetry and his verdict of banishment against certain classes of poets was most frequently quoted. Thus the Elizabethan critics' debt to Plato is negligible in comparison with their copious borrowings from Aristotle, Horace and their French and Italian imitators. "There is nothing in Elizabethan criticism corresponding to the influence exerted by the Platonic Philosophy on the works of the contemporary poets and thinkers."<sup>1</sup>

The explanation of this curious phenomenon is not far to seek. Plato was a seer and a lover

<sup>1</sup> Gregory Smith.





of poetic imagery and not a mere framer of rules. Even his observations on poetry and music are veiled in symbols. Criticism in the Elizabethan Age, however, was dogmatic, consisting in the application of rigid rules to literary works. Hence the set canons of Aristotle, Horace and the Renaissance critics, which lent themselves easily to this sort of handling, were more welcome to the professed literary critics of the Elizabethan Age than the Platonic ideas on poetry and music which are to be met with only in a philosophic poet like Spenser who by virtue of his temperament and sympathy could appreciate the poetic genius of Plato. This also explains why Spenser could not contribute anything to the systematic critical efforts of his times as Roger Ascham, Webbe, Puttenham and Sidney did, though he himself belonged to the literary coterie known as the Areopagus and in his letters to Harvey, he once strayed into the domain of literary criticism and supported the introduction of classical prosody into English. For Spenser's ideas of poetry, as borrowed from the poetic pages of Plato, it is necessary to go to his poems.

In poetry Plato recognised three distinct parts—the story or the words, the melody or harmony and rhythm or metre. He would permit only those stories which were beneficial to the state and ban those, for example, which ascribed vices to the gods. He preferred the Dorian and





Phrygian harmonies which kindled martial ardour and believed that different rhythms expressed different moral states—meanness, insolence, fury, courage, etc. Simple metres are the “expressions of a courageous and harmonious life,” while the complex ones are the expression of a jarring soul. “Beauty of style and harmony and good rhythm depend...on the true simplicity of a rightly and nobly ordered mind and character.” According to Plato, however, simplicity of rhythm is not only the expression or the product of a previously existing concord or balance in the soul; it is also the generative cause of the latter, just as complexity or want of rhythm in poetry produces a feeling of discord in the audience.

The basis of Plato's views on rhythm in poetry lies in his own system of Psychology and in his predilection for the Pythagorean Theory of Harmony to which probably it owed its origin. Jowett points out that “there is something Pythagorean in Plato's veneration for harmony.” The word harmony in the mouth of the Pythagoreans had always the suggestion of musical investigation. They made experiments with string-lengths and found out their arithmetical relations in consequence of which music or melody was produced out of jarring notes. Melody or music was called by them harmony, because its nature was numerically determinable and, according to the





Pythagoreans, number itself stood for harmony and order, while disorder meant a state of things which was not amenable to calculation according to the theory of numbers. "They declared that the odd and the even (numbers) are respectively identical with the limited and the unlimited. As all numbers are composed of the even and the odd, all things also combine in themselves fundamental antitheses, and specially that of the limited and unlimited. To this Heracleitan fundamental principle there is bound this logical consequence that everything is the reconciliation of opposites or a harmony."<sup>1</sup> The musical sound which they assumed to arise from the revolution of the spheres, was called by them "Harmony of the Spheres." It is this conception of reconciliation of the opposites with its necessary consequence of order and beauty that lies embedded in Plato's theory of rhythm and metre as also in his system of psychology according to which the three principles of the mind are violent antagonists of one another and a perfect state of the mind is produced by a balance of these principles and is hence described as harmony.

Plato's idea that rhythm in poetry is the generative cause of mental balance, is a bold one. It may possibly be paralleled by the medical theory, that sweet sounds soothe disordered brain, and soft notes bring repose to agitated

<sup>1</sup> Windelband's *History of Ancient Philosophy*, p. 95.





nerves.<sup>1</sup> Jowett thinks that the "indefinite and almost absolute control which the soul is supposed to exercise over the body according to Plato, is a fanciful paradox and that there is in him a confusion between the harmony of musical notes and the harmony of soul and body." But holding this view as he did, Plato advocated musical training for boys and young men as conducive to their mental balance and the formation of their habits. He says in the *Republic*, "When they (the teachers) have taught him the use of the lyre, they introduce him to the poems of other excellent poets who are the lyric poets ; and these they set to music, and make their harmonies and rhythms quite familiar to children's souls, in order that they may learn to be more gentle and harmonious and rhythmical." (Bk. III.) The same view is to be found in the *Laws*.<sup>2</sup>

It is the Platonic conception of music and poetry which is found in fragments in Spenser's works. In the October Eclogue of the *Shepherds Calender*, Cuddie laments the lot of poets and deprecates their art as an instrument of pandering to the giddy taste of the youth. But Pierce replies, in a higher strain, that the poet is the

<sup>1</sup> The analogous idea of the creation of the world out of jarring atoms in consequence of the power of music, is also Pythagorean and is to be found in Dryden's "Song for St. Cecilia's Day."

<sup>2</sup> *Laws*, VII, 602.





teacher of the youth and the controller of their wildness. He exclaims

“ O! what an honor is it, to *restraine*  
 The *lust of lawlesse youth* with good advice,  
 Or pricke them forth with pleasaunce of thy vaine,  
 Whereto thou list their trayned willes entice.”

Again, he thus describes the effect of Cuddie's song :

“ Soone as thou gynst to sette thy notes in frame,  
 O, how the rurall routes to thee doe cleave !  
 Seemeth thou dost their *soule of sence bereave*; ”<sup>1</sup>

The import undoubtedly is that music promotes balance and temperance in the soul. In explaining the words “restraine the lust of lawlesse youth with good advice,” E. K. refers to the source of their underlying idea and says, “This place seemeth to conspyre with Plato, who in his first booke de Legibus sayth, that the first invention of Poetry was of very vertuous intent. For at what time an infinite number of youth usually came to theyr great solemne feastes called Panegyrica, which they used every five yeere to hold, some learned man, being more hable then the rest for speciall gyftes of wytte and Musicke, would take upon him to sing fine verses to the people, in prayse eyther of vertue or of victory. At whose wonderfull gyft al men being astonied, and as it were ravished with delight, thinking that





he was inspired from above, called him vatem." On the lines beginning with the words 'sence bereave,' E. K. comments thus:—"What the secrete working of musick is in the myndes of men, as well appeareth hereby, that some of the auncient Philosophers, and those the moste wise, as *Plato and Pythagoras*, held for opinion, that the mynd was made of a certaine harmonie and musicall numbers, for the great compassion, and likenes of affection in thone and in the other, as also by that memorable history of Alexander." Then, after stating the effect of different notes of music on Alexander,<sup>1</sup> he continues: "Wherefore Plato and Aristotle forbid the Arcadian Melodie from children and youth. For that being altogether on the fyft and vii tone, it is of great force to molifie and quench the kindly courage, which useth to burne in yong brests. So that it is not incredible which the Poete here sayth, that Musick can bereave the soule of sence." The same idea occurs in the *Teares of the Muses*. Erato, the Muse of Erotic Poetry complains that, as an exponent of moderation in love, she has been superseded by rhymesters who kindle disorder and wildness in the soul.

"———I that rule in measure moderate  
The tempest of that stormy passion,  
.....  
Am put from practise of my kindlie skill,  
Banisht by those that Love with leawdnes fill."

<sup>1</sup> Also described in Dryden's *Alexander's Feast*.





According to Plato, Truth or the essence of Beauty is visible to human souls in the other world in proportion as the latter have achieved or realised inner balance or temperance. Thus love of Truth or Beauty is based on temperance. Plato says, "The soul which has seen most of truth shall come to the birth as a Philosopher, or Artist, or Musician, or Lover; that which has seen truth in the second degree, shall be a righteous king, or warrior, or Lord; the soul which is of the third class shall be a Politician, or Economist, or Trader—all these are states of probation in which he who lives righteously improves, and he who lives unrighteously deteriorates his lot." All these men do not retain the recollection of the vision equally well; in the case of most of them, it is very dim but it is fresh and clear in the case of a philosopher. Hence the philosopher who is always rapt in contemplation of Truth is represented by Plato as a lover enraptured with the Beauty of his Beloved, on which his soul loves to dwell.

By the philosopher Plato also means the poet, and therefore the philosopher's contemplation of Truth and the poet's worship of Beauty both receive their impetus from love. Poetry derives its inspiration from, and owes its existence to, love of Truth or Beauty Absolute and it is love that raises the poet on its golden wings high





above the gross and the earthly and gives him a vision of the supersensuous Reality or Beauty of which he sings so rapturously. Spenser follows the Platonic conception of the connection between love and poetry throughout his poems and in the opening lines to each of his four hymns, he invokes love to help on his song. In the *Shepherds Calender*, Pierce laments that there is no reward for poets even if they celebrate the glory of princes and noblemen, and hence it is better for them to avoid earthly themes and take up divine subjects. Cuddie replies that Colin would be fitter than he to do justice to such subjects, were he not hopelessly in love. But Pierce remarks :—

“ Ah fon ! for love does teach him climbe so hie,  
And lyftes him up out of the loathsome myre.” <sup>1</sup>

The other view of Poetry which is so very current and which is probably responsible for the multiplication of literary vermin and rhymesters, is that poetry is fed on pleasure and unholy mirth, fashion and folly. In the *Shepherds Calender*, Cuddie is an exponent of this theory and says :—

“ Who ever casts to compasse weightye prise,  
And thinkes to throwe out thondring words of threate,  
Let powre in lavish cups and thriftie bitts of meate,  
For Bacchus fruite is frend to Phoebus wise;  
And, when with Wine the braine begins to sweate,  
The numbers flowe as fast as spring doth ryse.” <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> October Eclogue, ll. 91-92.

<sup>2</sup> October Eclogue.





But in the *Teares of the Muses*, Erato states that training in the art of poetry is imparted by pure or true love which has its birth in the Almighty's bosom but which is unintelligible to the so-called poets.

*" Love wont to be school master of my skill,  
And the devicefull matter of my song;  
Sweete Love devoyd of villanie or ill,  
But pure and spotles, as at first he sprong  
Out of th' Almightyes bosome, where he nests;  
From thence infused into mortall brests."*

That true poetry is inspired and is not an ordinary art, is implied in the theory that love is at the root of all poetry. If it is true that love alone stimulates the production of poetry, it follows that the poet is but a machine to which force is supplied from outside. Plato says in the *Ion*, " All good poets, epic as well as lyric, compose their beautiful poems not as works of art, but because they are inspired and possessed." This inspiration defies rational analysis according to the ordinary laws of psychology and is therefore called a kind of madness by Plato. " There is a third kind of madness, which is a possession of the Muses; this enters into a delicate and virgin soul, and there inspiring frenzy, awakens lyric and all other numbers.—But he who not being inspired and having no touch of madness in his soul, comes to the door and thinks that he will get into the temple by the help of art,—he, I





say, and his poetry are not admitted." <sup>1</sup> Giving a mythological turn to this idea, Plato asserts that this madness or inspiration comes from the Muses. He even proceeds further and says it is traceable to God Himself. "They (the poets) are simply *inspired to utter that to which the Muse impels them, and ..... God takes away the minds of poets, and uses them as his ministers.*" <sup>2</sup>

The October Eclogue of the *Shepherds Calendar* embodies some of these Platonic ideas. In the argument Spenser describes the nature of Poetry almost exactly in the words of Plato,—  
 "no arte, but a divine gift and heavenly instinct not to bee gotten by laboure and learning, but adorned with both; and poured into the witte by a certain Enthousiasmos and celestiall inspiration."  
 Again, the English translation of Cuddie's Latin emblem given at the foot of the eclogue stands thus: "Hereby is meant, as also in the whole course of this *Æglogue*, that Poetry is a *divine instinct, and unnatural rage, passing the reach of common reason.*" Some may be inclined to look upon this as nothing more than the commonplace view current in the Elizabethan times and traceable to a variety of sources, especially Latin and French. But taken in connection with other conceptions derived from the *Republic* and some of the dialogues, it must be regarded as Platonic

<sup>1</sup> *Phædrus*.

<sup>2</sup> *Ion*.





in origin. There are also other indications in the body of the eclogue about Spenser's views on poetic inspiration. Poetry is spoken of as "streams of flowing wittes," "buddes of poesie" and as "shooting" and "springing," the suggestion being the spontaneity of its growth. There is nothing implying that the art of poetry has to be mastered with severe patience and after protracted self-training and that every poet passes through a period of strict self-criticism. Even Cuddie who is in the eclogue the exponent of the theory that poets can afford to live a life of low and vulgar pleasure, admits its spontaneous growth.

".....when with Wine the braine begins to sweate,  
The numbers flowe as fast as *spring doth ryse*."

Again, he says,

"Thou kenst not, Percie, howe the *ryme should rage*,  
O! if my temples were distaind with wine..."

The comment of E. K. on the above is as follows:—"He seemeth here to be ravished with a Poetical furie. For (if one rightly mark) the numbers rise so ful, and the verse groweth so big, that it seemeth he had forgot the meanenesse of shepherds state and stile." The other imagery symbolising poetic inspiration in Plato, viz., that God or the heavenly Muse bestows the power of song on poets, is implied in the following lines of Spenser:—

"O pierlesse Poesye! where is then thy place?  
If nor in Princes pallace thou dost sitt,





(And yet is Princes pallace the most fitt,)  
 No brest of baser birth doth thee embrace,  
 Then make thee winges of thine aspyring wit,  
 And, whence thou camst, flye back to heaven apace."<sup>1</sup>

Plato devotes two books of the *Republic* to the discussion of censorship on poetry. One form of it consists of a restriction on the choice of subjects to be handled in literature.<sup>2</sup> Stories about the vices of the gods are proscribed and poets in the ideal Republic are to sing of virtue and heroic deeds only.<sup>3</sup> "We must remain firm in our conviction that hymns to the gods and praises of famous men are the only poetry which ought to be admitted to our state."<sup>4</sup> Though Spenser does not follow Plato's strict view regarding censorship of poetry, he is in favour of some restriction on the choice of the subject-matter of poetry as well as on its exuberance. He has been called "the sage poet" and he has expressed in clear and unambiguous language the high moral purpose which ought to guide a poet. He had a strong opinion against the spirit of contemporary poetry and in the *Teares of the Muses* he characterised

<sup>1</sup> October Eclogue.

<sup>2</sup> Fiction, being supposed to be devoid of truth, was not to be permitted to flourish without restriction.

<sup>3</sup> Stories that ascribed magic powers to the gods or caused roars of laughter or overwhelming grief or painted in horrid colours pictures of the nether world, were prohibited.

<sup>4</sup> *Republic*, Bk. X.





most of the literary productions of his age as

" Heepes of huge wordes uphoorded hideously,  
With Horrid sound though having little sence."

Praise of virtue is specially mentioned by Spenser as a legitimate theme of poetry. In the *Mother Hubberds Tale* he scorns those vicious people who write on loose themes and thus merely "play the poet." The true poet is one

" .....whose onely pride  
Is virtue to advance, and vice deride—"

In the *Teares of the Muses* Calliope declares :

"—the nurse of vertue I am hight,  
And golden trumpet of eternitie—"

Spenser's poetic creed also includes the celebration of feats of 'heroes' or famous men. He is impressed like Plato with the necessity of "adorning the myriad actions of ancient heroes for the instruction of posterity."<sup>1</sup> Calliope laments that epic poetry which blazoned forth the heroic deeds of brave men, flourishes no more, because the brave are given to sloth and vice.<sup>2</sup> The Sonnets "addressed by the author of the *Faerie Queene* to various noblemen" in commending his poem to their patronage, also refer to the ancient practice of enshrining heroic deeds in poetry. The Sonnet to the Earl of

<sup>1</sup> Phaedrus.

<sup>2</sup> *Teares of the Muses*.





Northumberland, for example, has these lines :—

“ The sacred Muses have made alwaies clame  
To be the Nourses of nobility,  
And *Registres of everlasting fame,*  
To all that *armes professe and chevalry.* ”

The Sonnets to Lord Ch. Howard and Sir John Norris contain similar passages. The reasons given by Spenser for glorifying heroic deeds are the same as those advanced by Plato.

“ —who would ever care to doo brave deed,  
Or strive in vertue others to excell,  
If none should yeeld him his deserved meed,  
Due praise, that is the spur of dooing well ? ”

“ Hymns to the Gods ” which constitute another class of licensed poetry in Plato’s *Republic*, do not appear in Spenser in the form probably contemplated by Plato ; for Spenser has not sung the praises of the mythological gods and goddesses of ancient Greece. Yet it would seem that he used the word hymn in the headlines of his four well-known poems advisedly. The first two, except for their philosophical tinge, are in the ordinary amorous vein ; yet they have adopted the external form of hymnic composition. Spenser, however, repented of the folly of his early youth and made amends in the two other poems which more nearly approach the spirit of devotional poetry. They have all the seriousness, solemnity and purity which Plato expressly desired in his “ Hymns to the Gods.”





## CHAPTER IV

### SPENSER AND BRUNO

“The awakener of nodding spirits, the queller of insolent and kicking ignorance, in all his actions betokening a general love of mankind..... he who looks not to the anointed head, the crossed forehead, the washen hands, and the circumcision, but to the spirit and the cultivation of the wit, whenever he is suffered to see the face of a true man”—these are the words in which Bruno describes himself to the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford. The words are significant and the portrait drawn by the hand of no mean artist, is true to life. Pride and self-conceit are indeed writ large on this advertisement but Bruno's iconoclasm, his zeal for knowledge, his yearning for communion with the all-pervading spirit of the universe are equally indicated by it.

The violence of Bruno was foreign to the calm, contemplative mood of Plato, and his hurry was alien to the slow ratiocination of the Platonic Socrates. The pantheism of the Nolan also differed from the Philosophy of the Academy which, though it traced the things of the world to their types in the Ideas and finally to the Good, was sharply dualistic. Still there is some affinity between Plato's pursuit of the Good and the Beautiful (as





in the *Symposium*) through successive stages and Bruno's attempt at the realisation of "La Causa, Principio et Uno."<sup>1</sup> The stimulus for the upward journey is furnished in both the philosophers by love and both concern themselves with an analysis and definition of amatory life. There is in both the same distinction between vulgar or sensual and celestial love.

Bruno, however, drew more largely on the Platonists and the Neo-Platonists than on Plato and Plotinus. The recognised expositions of Ficinus, Benivieni and Pico must have been familiar to him and must have furnished him with many of his philosophic creeds. Spenser, as Prof. Elton points out,<sup>2</sup> was indebted for his ideas of mystic love and beauty to the same sources as Bruno, though other Platonic ideas were taken by him directly from Plato. The two later hymns of Spenser were published in 1596 and, though the first two hymns might have been written earlier—in "greener times of my youth,"—they were amended and altered for publication in 1596 along with the two others. *De Gli Heroici Furori*, embodying the mystic creeds of Bruno and describing "the upward journey of the soul towards illumination," was published in England in 1584-85. There being a good deal of similarity between these works, the

<sup>1</sup> This is also the title of one of Bruno's Dialogues.

<sup>2</sup> *Modern Studies*, p. 28.





question arises whether Spenser imbibed any influence from Bruno.

Professor Elton, in his sketch of Bruno's activities in England, holds that Spenser owed nothing to him, so far as his ideas of love and beauty in his hymns are concerned. His arguments are based on the difference between the spirits of these two authors as well as on the contemporary records of literary circles in England. Though Bruno lectured or disputed at Oxford on Aristotle's theory of immortality and the accepted Astronomy of those days, Professor Elton says he was little noticed. "There is no trace of any permit being granted, nor is Bruno named among the foreigners who were incorporated in the University." Only one Oxonian, Samuel Daniel the poet, has alluded to Bruno's oratory. Again, Bruno was well acquainted with Sidney and Fulke Greville (Lord Brooke). To Sidney was dedicated the *Spaccio* and the dedication runs over with the praise of this scholar and nobleman whom Bruno salutes in gratitude. Greville, too, is honoured in this dedication, but he is more specially mentioned in *La Cena* in connection with a banquet at Greville's house to which Bruno was invited. In spite of his close acquaintance with these two leading Englishmen, none of them ever mentions Bruno. No allusion to his name has yet been traced in the English writings of the sixteenth century. "No written word of





Bruno's appears to have been quoted as his until the day of the Spectator and Toland." All this, says Professor Elton, points to the conclusion that Bruno was not a recognised focus of thought and culture in England and that he did not leave any deep impression on the English mind and consequently on Spenser.

Again, the tempers of the two Neo-Platonists are as poles apart. The fiery, pugnacious spirit of Bruno is totally different from the pensive, contemplative—often world-weary—mood of the author of the *Faerie Queene*. The vanity and conceit of the Nolan and his barefaced self-advertising are equally alien to the languor and despondency of the English poet who felt so keenly his neglect at the court and who composed the *Shepherds Calendar* and the *Visions and Petrarch and Bellay*. Moreover, Bruno's fire and buoyancy made him blind to the finer qualities of women and the softer graces of life. "His tone is like that of Whitman; he is strenuous, he says, and invincible and male." According to Professor Elton, there could not be any bond of sympathy between such a thinker and Spenser who painted varied female characters full of beauty and goodness and who derived his chief inspiration from chivalry. Bruno had nothing but contempt for womankind. The descriptive epithets most frequently applied to women are "Frailty" and "Imperfection"; they are, Bruno says, "the first matter" of Aristotle and





necessary only for the purpose of propagation of species. Only very rarely some conventional mark of respect is showed to them. Thus Bruno knows only two types of love—a beastly impulse and an intellectual rage for immersion in the Infinite. Love between man and woman in its higher aspects is altogether unfamiliar to Bruno. Hence according to Professor Elton, there could not be any literary intercourse between the Nolan philosopher and the English poet who, though not blind to Divine Love, liked to dwell with joy and pleasure on the pure affection which links the souls of man and woman in a holy bond. Says Spenser :

“ —love is Lord of truth and loialtie,  
Lifting himselfe out of the lowly dust  
On golden plumes up to the purest skie, — —  
Above the reach of loathly sinfull lust.”<sup>1</sup>

It must be admitted that there is great force in the arguments of Professor Elton. Considerable value attaches to his labours on the contemporary records which, he points out, are almost silent about Bruno's presence in England. This silence is indeed remarkable. It proves that Bruno received scant public recognition in England, but it does not follow that a literary man and a scholar like Spenser was unfamiliar with his published works. Bruno did not appear before the public and his disputation at the Oxford University took





place in the presence of only the members of the University and was purely academic. He was a foreigner who in the seclusion of the French Embassy in London passed his time in writing books on philosophical topics in foreign languages (Latin and Italian). These were not translated into English and it is not strange that they should have failed to fetch him reputation or even to attract public notice. But absence of public notice does not necessarily mean that nobody was interested in Bruno's works—not even those who knew Italian or Latin and had an opportunity of reading them. As for Spenser, Professor Elton himself admits that the influence of the *Spaccio* is discernible in the *Cantos of Mutabilitie*. "We seem to find an echo of Bruno in Spenser's verse.... We do not know when the broken cantos '*On Constancie*' were written, and Sidney, to whom the *Spaccio* was dedicated, may have made it known to his friend. The fragment certainly recalls part of the *Spaccio* in its machinery and some other works of Bruno in its ruling idea. Both writers play with large conceptions of change and recurrence. Here also is a conclave of gods led by Jove and discomfited by the feeling of decay. Mutability is a 'Titaness' who makes a struggle to revive her dynasty. She pleads before the gods her right of conquest. So far the scenery closely recalls that of the *Spaccio*; but the sequel differs. Nature sits in





judgment and before her, in proof of the endlessness of Change, passes the pomp of the Seasons, Months and Hours.

‘ For who sees not that Time on all doth prey?  
But times do change and move continually,  
And nothing here long standeth in one stay.’

But Nature pronounces that if all things change, they change in a fixed cycle (so that change and order imply each other).<sup>1</sup> Thus to his sweeping conclusion that Bruno left no influence on English thought or literature, Professor Elton admits one exception, viz., that the *Spaccio* furnished Spenser with the ideas on change found in his *Cantos of Mutabilitie*. But he goes further and tacitly admits Spenser's acquaintance with *Gli Heroici Furori*. Referring to the ruling idea of the *Cantos of Mutabilitie*, viz., that change merely implies a fixed order, Elton remarks, “The notion is an old one, but it had been phrased recently in *Gli Heroici Furori*, though without Spenser's Christian application.” If Spenser read one book of Bruno, it is just possible that he should have read another, and if one of the ideas of *Gli Heroici Furori* is traceable in him, it is not quite incredible that another idea from the same book should have also been a source of inspiration to him.

\* Professor Elton's arguments based on the difference in temper and mental outlook between

<sup>1</sup> Elton's *Modern Studies*, p. 33.





Bruno and Spenser, are not quite convincing. It is true that the savagery of the Dominican monk contrasts strongly with the contemplative languor of the English poet. It is also true that Spenser's human conception of love is absent from Bruno who is thinking either of gross sensuality or of an intellectual rage for communion with the Infinite. But it does not follow that the former could not have received hints from the latter and worked them up in his own way. Literary influence does not mean wholesale borrowing, though plagiarism was common in the Elizabethan times. Unless there is palpable and obvious imitation, the material taken by one writer from another usually reappears in a different garb, because the borrowed ideas must pass through the crucible of the borrower's mentality and temperament. It is not difficult to illustrate this from Spenser himself. The direct influence of Plato on Spenser is undoubted, so far at least as the latter's conceptions of love and beauty are concerned. But the Platonic theory of love does not recognise man's noble love for woman. The institution of friendship in ancient Greece often furnished instances of bestial passion and Plato seized on it and made it the stepping-stone to the love of Intellectual Beauty.<sup>1</sup> But none of his stages of ascent comprises the pure, sincere

<sup>1</sup> *Contemporary Review*, Vol. LVIII, p. 402 : "The Dantesque and Platonic Ideals of Love."





affection linking man and woman. The speech of Phaedrus in the *Symposium*, indeed, holds up an ideal of noble love, but the context shows that it means nothing more than ideal friendship between man and man. Thus Plato is as unchivalrous as Bruno—both are equally blind to the purity of woman's love. But Spenser gives a high place to it and some of his best female characters<sup>1</sup> derive their charm and interest from their capacity for profound love. Britomart typifies chaste love of this kind, and Una and Florimell bear a family likeness to her. The feeling which inspires them is described by Spenser as

“.....that sweete fit that doth true beautie love  
And choseth vertue for his dearest dame,  
Whence spring all noble deedes and never-dying  
fame.”<sup>2</sup>

Now, it can never be contended that because Plato did not recognise the purity and elevating power of woman's love for man, Spenser owes nothing of his conception of romantic love to Plato. Spenser's debt to Plato is too well-founded to be shaken by such logic. What Spenser did was to make a blend of Plato's theory and the culture of Northern Europe; he grafted the notion contained in Phaedrus' speech in the *Symposium* on the old

<sup>1</sup> The heroines of Spenser have furnished models of womanly perfection to Shakespeare.

<sup>2</sup> *F. Q.*, Bk. III, C. III.





Teutonic reverence for women. Says Dr. Courthope in his *History of English Poetry*, "Love in the poetry of the Middle Ages reveals itself in two aspects ; it is either a Platonised reflection of the old Teutonic reverence for women, or it is a school of knightly manners, where the castled aristocracy may cultivate a peculiar system of sentiment and language, distinguishing their order from the plebeian world around them. Dante's Beatrice and Spenser's Una are the representatives of one class; Guillaume de Lorris's new version of the art of love, in *The Romance of the Rose*, is the type of the other. The former conception breathes its spirituality into the beautiful characters of Shakespeare's women, making the unselfishness of Viola, the patience of Imogen, and the purity of Isabella, at once ideal and credible."<sup>1</sup>

Difference in temper or outlook between two writers does not, therefore, preclude all possibility of literary indebtedness. It is not inherently impossible that the intellectual rage of Bruno should have received a Christian colouring in Spenser or formed in him the basis of pure affection between man and woman—affection which leads their souls up to the apprehension of Divinity. The problem of literary indebtedness cannot be solved satisfactorily by a mere reference to the difference in temper between the two authors.

<sup>1</sup> Vol. IV, 452.





What is more important for this purpose is to establish actual contact or interchange of ideas between them and to demonstrate the similarity of their ideas by an examination of the internal evidence presented by their works.

Professor Elton brushes aside the possibility of actual contact between Spenser and Bruno. He says that Sidney might have lent the *Spaccio* to Spenser and hence the resemblance between this work and the *Cantos of Mutabilitie*. But a loan of *Gil Heroici Furori* is not regarded by him as a possibility. He, however, omits to mention that *Gil Heroici Furori*, too, was dedicated to Sidney and it is just probable that Sidney should have lent it to Spenser as he had lent the *Spaccio*. Again, Professor Elton has not very exhaustively compared the literary productions of Bruno and Spenser. He notices only Bruno's contrast between vulgar and spiritual love and dismisses it with the remark that though passages embodying the same idea are present in Spenser, it does not follow that the Englishman was influenced by the Italian. But it is not the ordinary distinction between the beastly and spiritual love that is present in Bruno's treatise. Spiritual love in Bruno has a distinct meaning. It is not the love of God as a personal Being, nor of any moral ideal but means the search for knowledge or Wisdom as the Final Reality. Owen says, "Though I admit Bruno's Pantheistic leanings, and his frequently





expressed affection for the Divine which exists in Nature, neither this nor the cognate abstractions of the Infinite and Absolute, so far as they express definite and final attainment, are the supreme objects\* of his passionate love.....Like Lessing, he prefers search for Truth to Discovered Truth; or, as he is a poet almost more than a philosopher, we may compare him to Sir John Suckling and his preference for Desire as superior to fruition.....Bruno's mistress, like that of so many Platonising thinkers, is "Intellectual Beauty"—the passion rather than its object, or the passion transformed and elevated to an object. He describes her charms with an ardent tenderness and ecstatic rapture which a material and human object of passion could hardly have inspired."<sup>1</sup> Bruno's dialogue has therefore been very appropriately compared to Shelley's *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*.<sup>2</sup> Spenser's object of search, too, is not God but Sapience attainable through a strenuous upward march. Her seat is Truth and she is encompassed in a blaze of light. It is of her charms that the poet sings so rapturously in his last *Hymne*.

There are also other ideas of Bruno which closely resemble Spenser's; of these, however, Professor Elton takes no note. There are, for instance, his theories of Beauty, his ideas

<sup>1</sup> *Sceptics of the Italian Renaissance*, p. 312.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 334.





concerning the exaggerated notion which the lover has of the beloved's beauty and accomplishments and the gradual, stage by stage, ascent of the soul towards Heavenly Beauty. Miss Winstanley's Introduction to the *Fowre Hymnes* traces in detail the resemblance between *Gli Heroici Furori* and these poems. According to Bruno, Beauty is not a thing appealing to the senses only. The beauty which is seen in material objects can be easily spoilt, so that a body can be changed from beauty to ugliness in a moment. He says, "The beauty that is seen in body is a thing accidental and shadowy."<sup>1</sup> Beauty is the light of spirit shining through matter. The idea is clearly discernible in Spenser's *Hymne in honour of Beautie*. Referring to the Pattern of Beauty, for example he says,

"Thereof as every earthly thing, partakes  
Or more or lesse, by *influence divine*,  
So it more faire accordingly it makes,  
And the grosse matter of this earthly myne  
Which clotheth it thereafter doth refyne."<sup>2</sup>

Human beauty, according to Bruno, is the effect of the fineness of the soul. The soul by its formative energy shapes and irradiates the body which it inhabits. "All the loves, if they be heroic and not purely animal ..... have for object

<sup>1</sup> Miss Winstanley's Introduction, p. lxiii.

<sup>2</sup> *H. B.*, st. VII.





the divinity, tend towards divine beauty, which first is communicated to souls and shines in them, and from them, or rather through them, it is communicated to bodies; whence it is that well-ordered affection loves the body or corporeal beauty, in so much as it is an indication of beauty of spirit. Thus that which causes the attraction of love to the body is *a certain spirituality which we see in it, and which is called beauty.*"<sup>1</sup> Again, "The Platonists say, there are two kinds of knots which link the soul to the body. One is a certain vivifying action which from the soul descends into the body, like a ray; the other is a certain vital quality which is produced from that action in the body."<sup>2</sup> This idea too is familiar to readers of Spenser's *Hymnes*.<sup>3</sup>

Bruno explains in detail why the lover believes his beloved to be supernaturally beautiful. In the manner of Castiglione and Pico, he asserts that the lover loves not the body but the soul and that love is generated only when the lover has conceived an idea or image of the beauty of his beloved's soul. This idea is noticeable in the following lines of Spenser:

"But they, which love indeede, looke otherwise,  
With pure regard and spotlesse true intent,

<sup>1</sup> *The Heroic Enthusiasts*, tr. L. Williams, Part I, p. 75.

<sup>2</sup> *The Heroic Enthusiasts*, Part I, p. 86.

<sup>3</sup> *H. B.*, sts. IV, VII and XIX.





Drawing out of the object of their eyes  
A more refyned forme, which they present  
Unto their mind, voide of all blemishment  
Which it reducing to her first perfection,  
• Beholdeth free from fleshes frayle infection." <sup>1</sup>

The theme of the progressive realisation of Divine Beauty has been handled by Spenser in his *Hymne of Heavenly Beautie*. The stages of ascent here are, first, the handiwork of God, next His essential quality of Righteousness and lastly Sapience figured as His bride. Bruno also follows this method of pursuit of the Divine and goes similarly from fair forms to fairer spiritual entities in his upward journey. He says, "The Intellect being developed to the comprehension of a certain definite and specific form, and the will to a love commensurate with such comprehension; the intellect does not stop there, but by its own light it is prompted to think of this ; that it contains within itself the germ of everything intelligible and desirable, until it comes to comprehend with the intellect the depth of the *fountain of ideas*, the *ocean of every truth and goodness*. So that it happens, that whatever conception is presented to the mind, and becomes understood by it, from that which is so presented and comprehended it judges, that above it, is other greater and greater, and finds itself ever in a certain way





discoursing and moving with it. Because it sees that all which it possesses is only a limited thing, that therefore cannot be sufficient of itself, nor good of itself, nor beautiful of itself; because it is not the universal nor the absolute entity; but contracted into being this nature, this species, this form, represented to the intellect and present to the soul. Then from the beautiful that is understood, and consequently limited, and therefore beautiful through participation, it progresses towards that which is *really beautiful*, which has no margin, nor any boundaries."<sup>1</sup> At another place the following passage occurs :—

“ The soul which is in the horizon of Nature, is corporeal and incorporeal, and contains that with which it rises to superior things and declines to things inferior. And this...does not happen by reason and order of local motion, but solely through the impulse of one and of another power or faculty. As when the sense rises to the imagination, the imagination to the reason, the reason to the intellect, the intellect to the mind, then the whole soul is *converted into God* and inhabits the intelligible world; whence, on the other hand, she descends in an inverse manner to the world of feeling, through the intellect, reason, imagination, sense, vegetation.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Heroic Enthusiasts*, Part I, p. 97.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 111-112.





The last sentence strikes a note of mysticism which furnishes the inspiration of the erotic treatise *Gli Heroici Furori* as a whole. The purgation of the soul in order to make it free from the taint of sense, its elevation to the plane of intellect and its final absorption in the One and Incomprehensible—all this is dealt with in Spenser's last two hymns as in Bruno.

Bruno had not the reputation of being an orthodox Christian and, as a matter of fact, he died the death of a heretic. But there were few who were so much inspired with the love of God and "lived and moved and had their being" in Him so consciously as he. "Theophilus" and not "Atheist" is the descriptive epithet really applicable to him. His devotion to and love of God find expression not only in his philosophic monism but also in his aesthetics and cosmogony. The supreme beauty is the Beauty of God reflected in this world. The reflection is dim; yet in this reflection also we see that supreme beauty, though in an attenuated form, just as we see the trace of Divine Wisdom in the creative skill displayed in the magnificent fabric of the universe. "The Divinity is the final object, the ultimate and most perfect, but not in this state, where we cannot see God except as in a shadow or a mirror..... Now in such conceptions and similitudes the human intellect of this lower world nourishes itself, till such time





as it will be lawful to behold with purer eye the beauty of the divinity."<sup>1</sup> The germ of the idea may lie in Plato who traces everything to Good and Beauty, but the angle of vision is different. Plato would not feel the presence of God directly in the visible world ; he would regard it only as a stepping-stone to realisation of the Divine. In Bruno the tone of the devotee is heard even above the hum of philosophy. The note is not different from that of the Christian pietist or of Calvin whom, as an orthodox Protestant, Spenser followed faithfully. Spenser also speaks of *God as revealing himself* in His creation in the manner of Bruno and Calvin. God shows himself clearly and directly

....." in th' image of his grace,  
As in a looking-glasse, through which he may  
Be seene of all his creatures vile and base,  
That are unable else to see his face—"<sup>2</sup>

Again, Spenser says :—

" The meanes, therefore, which unto us is lent  
Him to behold, is on his workes to looke,  
Which he hath made in beauty excellent,  
And in the same, as in a brazen booke,  
To reade enregistred in every nooke,  
His goodnesse, which his beauty doth declare; "

<sup>1</sup> *The Heroic Enthusiasts*, tr. L. Williams, Part I, pp. 80-81.

<sup>2</sup> *H. H. B.*, at. XVII.

<sup>3</sup> *H. H. B.*, at. XIX.





Bruno expresses a similar idea about realisation of divinity when he says that God is seen in his creation as the architect's skill is discernible in his handiwork. "As happens to him, who, absorbed in the contemplation of some elaborate *architectural work*, goes on examining one thing after another in it, enchanted and feeding in a wonder of delight; but if it should happen that he sees the lord of all those pictures, who is of a beauty incomparably greater, *leaving all care and thought of them*, he is turned intently to the examination of *him*."<sup>1</sup> There is not much difference in tone and spirit between this passage of Bruno and the Chant of the Bible, "The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth his handiwork."

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<sup>1</sup> *The Heroic Enthusiasts*, tr. L. Williams, Part I, p. 81.





## CHAPTER V

### COURTESIE

The *Cortegiano* of Baldesar Castiglione has been called the Bible of the Renaissance courtier. It tries to arrive at the conception of the ideal courtier through the united efforts of the speakers taking part in its discourse.<sup>1</sup> The virtues attributed to the perfect courtier were naturally suggested by the Renaissance conception of the cultured man. As culture flourished in those days only under the aegis of princes and kings in whose courts it was often so carefully nurtured, the cultured man was identified with the courtier.

The Renaissance culture was different from the knightly manners and came in time to supplant them, though there was something common between the two. The castled aristocracy of the mediaeval times were not more staunch in their devotion to arms or in their respect for ladies to whose protection they dedicated their career, than the "omini di plazzo" of the fifteenth century. But in the new era some softer graces were regarded as a necessary supplement to the sterner virtues so highly valued by mediaeval knights. The softening influence of the advancing civilisation in Europe, which had advanced nowhere

<sup>1</sup> *Il Cortegiano*, Libro Primo, XII.





more than in Italy, acted as a solvent on the hard crust of the chivalric code and on the ideal of the Iron Age which was fast disappearing. The Italians no longer stagnated in the isolation from which the nations of northern Europe were suffering even in the 15th century, but their country was linked by commerce and maritime activity with the greater part of the world as it was then known. Busy centres of trade dotted its coast as well as its interior where foreigners came with their own manners and culture and where wealth added to the amenities of life. The blessings of a settled and peaceful urban life modified men's manners and thought. Not the least important was the influence of the Revival of Classical Learning which naturally held up before man an intellectual ideal that refused to recognise muscular strength or religious fervour as the chief desideratum of human life. The new ideal of culture owed a good deal to Greek thinkers and can be traced in its main features to the pages of Plato, Aristotle and Plutarch as well as to later works based on them, like those of Cicero and Piccolomini. The emphasis laid on moderation and good birth as the essential attributes of an accomplished man or a courtier, was derived from Aristotle. The insistence on both martial attributes and literary taste seems to be an echo of the *Republic* where Plato laid down that members of the governing class should have training both in



music and gymnastics. This influence of Plato and other classical writers was acknowledged by Castiglione in his reply to those critics of his work who ridiculed his portrait of the ideal courtier as overdrawn and unconvincing. "Altri dicono, che essendo tanto difficile e quasi impossibile trovar un uomo così perfetto come io voglio che sia il Cortegiano, è stato superfluo il scriverlo, perché vana cosa è insegnar quello che imparar non si può. A questi rispondo, che *mi contenterò aver errato con Platone, Senofonte e Marco Tullio*, lasciando il disputare del mondo intelligibile e delle Idee ; tra le quali, sì come (secondo quella opinione) è la Idea della perfetta Repubblica, e del perfetto Re, e del perfetto Oratore, così è ancora quella del perfetto Cortegiano."<sup>1</sup>

The courtier was not a product of Castiglione's imagination or a *sui generis* creation of any single brain. The Renaissance courtier was the product of the age in which Castiglione flourished. Hence he figures prominently in the pages of other contemporary writers who, in so far as they were indebted to outside influence, drew on the same sources as Castiglione. *Il Nennio* of Nenna looks upon the Aristotelian mean as one of the happiest attributes of the courtier. In Muzio's *Gentilhuomo* the greatest emphasis is laid on good birth<sup>2</sup> and virtue as the mark of the typical courtier, and this is also of

<sup>1</sup> *Il Cortegiano*, Lettera Dedicatoria, III.

<sup>2</sup> *Modern Language Review*, Vol. V, p. 152.





Aristotelian origin. Guazzo in his *Civil Conversation* tries to make out a case for good manners<sup>1</sup> and high birth while Annibale Romei in his *Discorsi* (as well as Guazzo in his *Civil Conversation*) makes a noble oration on love in the manner of Bembo's speech in the *Cortegiano* and asserts, like Diotima in the *Symposium*, that noble love is the mark of a high soul. Though classical in his remote origin, the courtier, the product of the Italian Renaissance, is not a strange and unfamiliar figure in the modern world. Nothing in his moral attributes, his manners or his intellectual gifts is antiquated. In fact, when allowances have been made for the lapse of centuries and when some of the superficial inutilities have been removed, the 15th century courtier is easily recognised to be the modern gentleman.

Just as the Classical Renaissance spread from Italy over the rest of Europe and the mystic creed of Neo-Platonism was transplanted from Florence and other cities of North Italy to other countries, the ideal of culture and good breeding that grew up in 15th century Italy crossed seas and mountains and affected human thought in distant countries. Its influence was very marked in England where Italianism was for some time regarded as the acme of cultural perfection. Serious-minded people saw the danger of indiscri-

<sup>1</sup> *Modern Language Review*, Vol. V, p. 152.





minate imitation and purists positively abhorred the gentleman who had returned from a travel in Italy on the principle that

"An Englishman Italianate  
Is the Devil Incarnate."

Besides the native literature of England in the Elizabethan Age, *e.g.*, the Comedies of Shakespeare<sup>1</sup> and the Drama of the Decadence which reflects more specially the excesses of Italian life, there are actually English translations of this period of the courtesy-books of Italy, to illustrate the response which England made to the blandishments of Italy's culture. The *Cortegiano* was translated into English by Sir Thomas Hoby as early as in 1561. *Il Nennio* was translated by W. Jones in 1595. The English translation of Count Romei's *Discorsi* by J(ohn) K(epers) was published in 1598 and that of Guazzo's *Civil Conversation* by Young was published in 1586. Lodovick Bryskett translated Giraldi's book with the heading "*A Discourse of Civill Life; containing the Ethike part of Morall Philosophie*" about the year 1582. The remarks made by Bryskett in the Preface to this book show how highly Englishmen of the Elizabethan Age thought of these handbooks of Italian culture, how they traced ideas found in them to the

<sup>1</sup> Miss Scott traces the characters of Benedick and Beatrice to the *Cortegiano*. See p. 450 of "*Elizabethan Translations from the Italian*."





philosophy of Plato and Aristotle and considered them as infallible guides in matters of conduct. Bryskett refers to three Italian writers of such manuals of culture, *viz.*, Piccolomini, Giraldis and Guazzo, "all three" having written upon the Ethick part of morall Philosophie both exactly and perspicuously," and envies "the happinesse of the Italians who have in their mother-tongue late writers that have with a singular easie method *taught all that which Plato or Aristotle have confusedly or obscurely left written.*"<sup>1</sup>

This Preface also shows that Spenser was acquainted with some at least of the Italian courtesy-books and regarded them as helpful guides in the field of Ethics. Spenser was Bryskett's literary adviser in Ireland and when, at a social gathering of friends at a cottage near Dublin, Bryskett humbly requested him as a classical scholar to discourse on "Morall philosophie" and explain to them "what the same is, what be the parts thereof, whereby virtues are to be distinguished from vices," Spenser asked to be excused for the time being, requesting them to await the completion of the *Faerie Queene* and suggested as an alternative that Bryskett should read out his translation of Giraldis, confident that this would afford as much edification to the

<sup>1</sup> Prof. Hale's Introduction to the Globe Edition of Spenser's works.





audience as his discourse could be expected to do. Bryskett in his Preface thus reports his speech:—  
 “I haue seen (as he knoweth) a translation made by himselfe (*i.e.*, Bryskett) *out of the Italian tongue of a dialogue comprehending all the Ethick part of Moral Philosophy*, written by one of those three (*viz.*, Guazzo, Giraldi and Piccolomini) he formerly mentioned, and *that is by Giraldi under the title of a dialogue of ciuil life*. If it please him to bring us forth that translation to be here read among us, or otherwise to deliuer to us, as his memory may serue him, the contents of the same; he shall (I warrant you) *satisfie you all at the ful* ..... Neither let it trouble him that I so turne ouer to him againe the taske he wold haue put me to; for it falleth out fit for him to verifie the principall of all this Apologie, euen now made for himselfe; because thereby it will appeare that he hath not withdrawne himselfe from seruice of the state to liue idle or wholly priuate to himselfe, but hath spent some time in doing that which may greatly benefit others and *hath serued not a little to the bettering of his owne mind and increasing of his knowledge*, though he for modesty pretend much ignorance, and pleade want in wealth, much like some rich beggars, who either of custom, or for couetousnes, go to begge<sup>1</sup> of others, those things whereof they haue no want at home.”<sup>1</sup>  
 That Spenser had this high opinion of the value and usefulness of these Italian works, is further

<sup>1</sup> Prof. Hale's Introduction, xxxiv.





indicated by his adulatory sonnet to William Jones, prefixed to the latter's English translation of *Il Nennio*.

"Who so wil seeke, by right deserts, t'attaine,  
Unto the type of true Nobility;  
And not by painted shewes, and titles vaine,  
Derived farre from famous Auncestrie:  
Behold them both in their right visnomy  
Here truly pourtray'd as they ought to be,"<sup>1</sup>

When all these materials are taken into consideration, the probability becomes very strong that Spenser should have been influenced by this Italian ideal of culture in arriving at his conception of the noble specimen of humanity which is depicted in the Sixth Book of the *Faerie Queene*. The high ideal of culture which he holds up before his countrymen is named Courtesie and Sir Calidore is its true type in the Book of Courtesie. As the *Faerie Queene* is a Romance on the model of the *Orlando Furioso*, the background in the Sixth Book is furnished by the age of chivalry. Knights and squires, distressed damzels and withered hags pass on in a phantasmagoric procession, while castles and battlements loom in the distance, echoing back the din of tournaments and the curses of the combatants. The actors in such a drama must naturally be governed by the chivalric code, and we find





instances of the disgracing of knights, the avenging of wrongs done to ladies and acceptance or refusal of challenges offered by opponents. But the Renaissance ideal governs the inner life of the Knight of Courtesie who is also a courtier of Queen Gloriana and the refined culture of Italy subdues the fiercer passions of the warrior and lends to him suavity of manners and affability of temperament. It is proposed to show by a detailed examination of Book VI of the *Faerie Queene* how far the characteristic marks of the new Italian ideal as set forth in the *Cortegiano* appear in its champion knight. Some trace of this ideal is also noticeable in the burlesque *Mother Hubberds Tale* where courts and courtiers are subjected to bitter sarcasm.

The *Cortegiano* does not state explicitly that a cultured man, such as it attempts to portray, should be in the service of a Prince. But there are hints and remarks in it which seem to suggest unmistakably that, in Castiglione's opinion, culture can flourish only in royal courts and cultured men are to be found invariably amongst courtiers. He was himself in the service of Guid'Ubaldo di Montefeltro, Duke of Urbino and, after his death, of his heir and successor, Francesco Maria della Rovere, and all the men referred to in the *Lettera Dedicatoria* as worthy of admiration and respect, were courtiers at Urbino. He professed to owe all that was best in him to





them and his work was informally dedicated to their revered memory and to that of his former patron Duke Guido.<sup>1</sup> Book I of the *Cortegiano* gives a detailed account of the court of the deceased Duke Guido and of his courtiers. Spenser's opinion of royal courts seems to be similar to Castiglione's and he says expressly that the court affords the most congenial soil for the growth of the virtue of 'courtesie' and of good manners.

" *Of court, it seemes, men courtesie doe call.  
For that it there most useth to abound;  
And well beseemeth that in Prince's hall  
That vertue should be plentifully found,  
Which of all goodly manners is the ground,  
And roote of civill conversation: "*<sup>2</sup>

Consistently with this theory, Calidore, the Knight of Courtesie, is put in the court of Gloriana.

There are differences of opinion amongst the authors of the Italian courtesy-books as to the necessity of high ancestry in the case of a courtier. Guazzo (in his *Civil Conversation*) regards it as all-important and complains against the indifference with which it was regarded in his days. Muzio sails in the same boat with Guazzo.<sup>3</sup> Castiglione, however, is not very positive as to its

<sup>1</sup> *Lettera Dedicatoria*, I.

<sup>2</sup> *F. Q.*, Bk. VI, C. I, st. I.

<sup>3</sup> See his *Gentilhuomo*.





absolute necessity, though he naturally looks upon it as a desirable asset. He, however, presents the cases for and against it with equal emphasis and when Spenser expresses himself in no uncertain terms in its favour, he seems to have been moved by the eloquent and persuasive speech of Conte Ludovico da Canossa and possibly by the arguments of Muzio, Guazzo and others of their way of thinking. The explanation why good birth is necessary in a courtier is found by Castiglione and others chiefly in the law of heredity, *viz.*, that good habits in parents produce in their children a facility for virtuous action. It is also asserted that in the very nature or blood of men nobly descended lies actually the seed of virtue, just as mettle is ingrained in an excellent breed of horses.<sup>1</sup> Spenser almost always connects good and valiant action with noble ancestry. Calidore guesses the parentage of Tristram from his honourable and daring conduct (*viz.*, in killing the discourteous knight) and then dubs him a Squire.

" He praysed it much, and much admyred it;  
That sure he weend him borne of noble blood,  
With whom those graces did so goodly fit: " <sup>2</sup>

Even the rustic who so faithfully serves Serena is at last discovered to be descended from noble

<sup>1</sup> *Il Cortegiano*, Libro Primo, XIV.

<sup>2</sup> *F. Q.*, Bk. VI, C. II, st. XXIV.





parents. Castiglione's illustration of a breed of horses is also seized on by Spenser :

"—seldome seene a trotting Station get  
An ambling Colt, that is his proper owne :  
So seldome seene that one in basenesse set  
Doth noble courage shew with curteous manners met."—

Though the Hermit is not a Courtier, his kindness towards Serena and the Squire of Prince Arthur is regarded as the effect of his high ancestry :—

"—well it seem'd that whilome he had beene  
Some goodly person, and of gentle race"—<sup>2</sup>

Physical beauty is essential in a courtier and Count Ludovico, the first speaker on the virtues of the courtier in Castiglione's work, insists on his having 'bella forma di persona e di volto.'<sup>3</sup> Spenser bestows on Sir Calidore "comely guize."<sup>4</sup>

It was, however, far from the intention of Castiglione to encourage vanity and foppishness, the two vices of Italians 'of mode' which repelled foreigners and, as a matter of fact, created a strong prejudice against them in England. Castiglione rates other qualities higher than personal beauty. Grace (a) of manners, (b) of speech and (c) of movement is of far greater

<sup>1</sup> F. Q., Bk. VI, C. III, st. I.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., Bk. VI, C. V, st. XXXVI.

<sup>3</sup> Il Cort., Libro Primo, XIV.

<sup>4</sup> F. Q., Bk. VI, Canto I, st. II.





worth, inasmuch as it readily impresses itself upon the minds of others and wins their respect and affection; and the Count is never weary of dilating on the value of this inexplicable accomplishment.<sup>1</sup>

The Count is not content without verifying the truth of his remark by an illustration. "Vedete il signor don Ippolito da Este cardinal di Ferrara, il quale tanto di felicità ha portato dal nascere suo, che la persona, (1) lo *aspetto*, (2) *le parole*, (3) *e tutti i suoi movimenti sono talmente di questa grazia composti ed accomodati*, che tra i più antichi prelati avvenga che sia giovane, rappresenta una tanto grave autorità, che più presto pare atto ad insegnare, che bisognoso d'imparare; medesimamente, nel conversare con omini e con donne d'ogni qualità, nel giocare, nel ridere e nel motteggiare tiene una certa dolcezza e così graziosi costumi, che forza è che ciascun che gli parla o pur lo vede gli resti perpetuamente affezionato."<sup>2</sup>

Spenser's portrayal of Calidore follows strictly the lines laid down in this extract. Referring to the Knights who adorned the Court of Gloriana, the poet says,

"—mongst them all was none more courteous Knight  
Then Calidore, beloved over-all,  
In whom, it seemes, that *gentlenesse of spright*  
And *manners mylde* were planted naturall;

<sup>1</sup> For the definition of Sprezzatura, see Libro Primo, XXVII.

<sup>2</sup> *Il Cort.*, Libro Primo, XIV.





To which he adding comely guise withall  
And gracious speech, did steale mens hearts away :<sup>1</sup>

This grace which opens the doorway to every heart cannot, according to Castiglione, be acquired through human effort. It is the gift of Fortune, the supreme dispenser of all good; it is through her favour that some persons are endowed from their very birth with an attractiveness of speech, action and movement. This is admitted by the two antagonistic speakers, Count Ludovico and Gaspar Pallavicino.<sup>2</sup>

In Spenser's champion knight "manners mylde were planted *naturall*."<sup>3</sup> Nature's influence is further recognised in Canto II of Bk. VI where Spenser notes, in the manner of the two above-mentioned speakers, the vain attempts made by unfortunate people to make up their congenital defects.

"—great helpe dame Nature selfe doth lend;  
For some so goodly *gratious* are by kind,  
That every action doth them much commend,  
And in the eyes of men great liking find,  
Which others that have greater skill in mind,  
Though they enforce themselves, cannot attaine;"<sup>4</sup>

In Bk. VI Calidore, though represented as beautiful, does not appear to be invertebrate or

<sup>1</sup> *F. Q.*, Bk. VI, C. I, st. II.

<sup>2</sup> *Il Cort.*, Lib. Primo, XV.

<sup>3</sup> *F. Q.*, Bk. VI, Canto I, st. II.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Bk. VI, C. II, st. II.





wanting in backbone and grit. Though he 'stole men's hearts away,'

"Nathlesse thereto he was *full stout and tall*—" <sup>1</sup>

Tristram who was made a squire by Calidore was "a tall young man," very different from the delicate courtier who is afraid to go out in the sun.

It is not enough that a courtier should not be delicate and effeminate: it is indispensable that he should be fully qualified to bear arms and to enter the thickest of the fray. The importance attached to martial attributes was, of course, due to the lingering influence of chivalry. It should be noted that the advance of civilization had not quelled in the Italians the fire and ardour of their forefathers. "Ma per venire a qualche particolarità, estimo che la principale e vera profession del cortegiano debba esser quella dell' arme." In the *Faerie Queene*, Calidore's skill in arms is especially mentioned. He was

"...well approv'd in *battleous affray*,  
That him did much renowne, and far his fame display." <sup>1</sup>

When he is first presented to the reader,

".....he was in travell on his way,  
Upon an *hard adventure sore bestad*—" <sup>1</sup>





Young Tristram is seen

" *Fighting on foot,.....*

*Against an armed knight that did on horseback ryde."*

Calidore's martial qualities and prowess are again emphasised when they are set in relief against the helplessness and pusillanimity of the shepherd Coridon, his rival for the hand of the fair Pastorella. When the tiger darted against her in the forest, Coridon, ignorant as he was of the use of arms, thought it most prudent to save his own life first, while Calidore, though he had no weapon except a shepherd's hook, came forward bravely and saved the life of the girl.<sup>1</sup> Again, Coridon fled from the island of the robbers, leaving his beloved to her fate, whereas Calidore openly met the brigands and fought with them for her rescue.<sup>2</sup>

Besides having skill in the use of arms, Castiglione's courtier was expected to be proficient in various other physical exercises, *e.g.*, riding, running, jumping, swimming, wrestling, etc.<sup>3</sup> About wrestling the author of the *Cortegiano* says, "Estimo ancora, che sia di momento assai il saper lottare, perché questo accompagna molto tutte l'arme da piedi. Appresso, bisogna che e per sée per gli amici intenda le querele e differenze che possono occorrere, e sia advertito nei vantaggi,

<sup>1</sup> *R. Q.*, Bk. VI, Canto X, st. XXXVI.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Canto XI.

<sup>3</sup> *Il Cort.*, Libro Primo, XXI.





in tutto mostrando sempre ed animo e prudenza." Calidore's skill in wrestling is shown in the crushing defeat he inflicted on Coridon who, as a rustic shepherd, was supposed by all to be an adept in the art and was fondly expected by his friends to get the better of a fine gentleman like his opponent.<sup>1</sup> The knight's skill in riding and running need not be pointed out. He followed the Blatant Beast over mountain and valley and through a thousand places, without a moment's rest, till

"Him in a narrow place he overtooke—"

In *Mother Hubberds Tale* also the qualifications of the good or ideal courtier include proficiency in arms, riding, running, wrestling, etc.

"—lothefull idlenes he doth detest,  
The canker worme of everie gentle brest;  
The which to banish with faire *exercise*  
Of *knightly feates*, he daylie doth devise:  
Now menaging the mouthes of *stubborne steedes*,  
Now practising the prooffe of *warlike deedes*,  
Now his *bright armes* assaying, now his speare,  
Now the nigh aymed *ring* away to beare.  
At other times he casts to sew *the chace*  
Of swift wilde beasts, or *runne on foote a race*,  
T'enlarge his breath, (large breath in armes most needfull)  
Or els *wrestling* to wex strong and heedfull—"

Though far above the common run of men in accomplishments and culture, the 'Cortegiano' was

<sup>1</sup> F. Q., Bk. VI, Canto IX, st. XLIII.





not required to remain in lordly seclusion and at a respectable distance from them. On the contrary, it was expected that he should mix with them freely and also take part in their recreations and amusements like balls, dances and pastime in the open air. "Voglio che'l Cortegiano descenda qualche volta a piú riposati e placidi esercizi, e per *schivar la invidia e per intertenersi piacevolmente con ognuno*, faccia tutto quello che gli altri fanno, non s'allontanando però mai dai laudevoli atti, e governandosi con quel buon giudizio che non lo lasci incorrere in alcuna sciocchezza; ma *rida, scherzi, motteggi, balli e danzi*, nientedimeno con tal maniera, che sempre mostri esser ingenioso e discreto, ed in ogni cosa che faccia o dica sia aggraziato."<sup>1</sup> While pursuing the Blatant Beast, Calidore met a merry group of rustics who offered him their homely food and drink.

"*The knight was nothing nice, where was no need,  
And tooke their gentle offer:*"

and enjoyed with them the festivities that were held in honour of Pastorella's beauty. A few days later, when the Knight had settled temporarily amongst the shepherds, he was asked to "lead the ring" with the fair shepherdess.<sup>2</sup> The Ape in *Mother Hubberds Tale*

<sup>1</sup> *Il Cort.*, Libro Primo, XXII.

<sup>2</sup> *F. Q.*, Bk. VI, Canto IX, st. LXI.





passes himself off as a courtier and the accomplishments Spenser bestows on him are also derived from the *Cortegiano*.

"For he could play, and daunce, and vaute, and spring,  
And all that els pertaines to reveling—"

One of the questions discussed by Castiglione towards the end of his treatise, is whether a courtier should be a lover. Bembo answers the question in the affirmative, but says that the courtier's love must be different in kind from the commonplace passion which bears that name. The courtier is the real lover in the true sense of the word; but he does not enjoy the beauty of his beloved through his sense of touch or his palate, but only through his eyes and ears. "Così come udir non si può col palato, né odorar con l'orecchie, non si può ancor in modo alcuno fruir la bellezza né satisfacer al desiderio ch'ella eccita negli animi nostri col tatto, ma con quel senso del qual essa bellezza è vero obietto, cho è la virtù visiva. Rimovasi adunque del cieco giudizio del senso, e godasi con gli occhi quel splendore, quella grazia, quelle faville amoroze, i risi, i modi e tutti gli altri piacevoli ornamenti della bellezza; medesima—mente con l'auditò la soavità della voce, il contentò delle parole, l'armonia della musica." Sir Calidore was content merely to have a sight of Pastorella now and then and to hear the music





of her voice.<sup>1</sup> True love, according to Castiglione, gives peace and repose and is a stranger to the pangs of jealousy. “Dal possedere il ben desiderato nasce sempre quiete e soddisfazione nell’animo dell’ possessore, se quello fosse il vero e bon fine del loro desiderio, possedendolo restariano quieti e satisfatti.” Again, “Sarà il nostro Cortegiano non giovane *fuor di tutte le amaritudini e calamità che senton quasi sempre i giovani, come le gelosie, i sospetti, li sdegni, l’ire, le disperazioni, e certi furor pieni di rabbia* dai quali spesso son indotti a tanto errore, che alcuni non solamente batton quelle donne che amano, ma levano la vita a sé stessi.”<sup>2</sup> It was Coridon who put on a frowning appearance at the sight of Calidore whom, as a rival lover, he looked upon as his mortal foe. But Calidore suffered no sting of jealousy and allowed Coridon to be Pastorella’s partner in the dance.<sup>3</sup> Love had given Calidore contentment, his ambition and vanity had disappeared, his soul was suffused with a new light and filled with a new treasure. Hence he could say to old Meliboe—

“ Give leave awhile, good father, in this shore  
To rest my barcke, which hath bene beaten lato  
With stormes of fortune and tempestuous fate  
In seas of troubles and of toylesome paine;—”

<sup>1</sup> *F. Q.*, Bk. VI, Canto IX, st. XII.

<sup>2</sup> *Il Cortegiano*, Libro Quarto, LXVI.

<sup>3</sup> Canto IX, st. XLI-XLII.





Love in the *Cortegiano* is not only an ornament of a cultured gentleman, but an instrument of uplifting the human soul to a higher plane where it can commune with Divinity. Bembo's oration on the elevating power of love is most inspiring. "O Amor Santissimo...abbrusciale in quella viva fiamma ehe consuma ogni bruttezza materiale, acciò che in tutto separate dal corpo, con perpetuo e dolcissimo legame s'uniscano con la bellezza divina."<sup>1</sup> That love leads man to mount up higher on the stepping-stone of physical beauty, that it purges the soul of its taint of sense as fire removes the dross from metals, and merges it in Divinity—all these constitute the subject-matter of the fullthroated song of Spenser in the *Hymnes to Heavenly Love and Heavenly Beautie*.

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<sup>1</sup> *Il Cortegiano*, Libro Quarto, LXX.





## ERRATA

Page.	Line.	Incorrect.	Correct.
3	24	had	has
6	18	execute	administer
7	5	bail	bailment
12	7	and	,
36	8	o	of
49	11	<i>Calendar</i>	<i>Calender</i>
57	17	„	„
64	11	<i>Gil</i>	<i>Gli</i>
64	13	„	„
69	3	that	and
72	14	Chant	chant

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## **Studies in Spenser**

BY

**Mohini Mohan Bhattacharji, M. A., Premchand Roychand**

**Student in the University of Calcutta.**

### **Extracts from Opinions :**

I have looked through the book, and am much impressed by the writer's mastery both of Spenser and of Platonic conceptions, illustrating once more the aptitude often observed in the Indian mind for entering into Western and especially Platonic ideas, as a rule less easily mastered by English minds. I trust that this remarkable contribution to the higher study of a great English poet may do something to enlarge the body of common culture and common intellectual ideals in which our two peoples may eventually find a true comradeship within our common humanity.—Dr. C. H. Herford.

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These five "Studies" are as it were by-products of the author's work in estimating the part played by Spenser's study of Plato in the whole body of his work. They are fascinating in themselves, interesting also as showing the varied ways in which Platonic ideas other than that of love attracted the poet, and also the by-paths through which pure Platonism reached Spenser, and in its passage was coloured and modified.....The whole book is an example of honest scholarship, well-documented, well-planned, well-written, and does vast credit to the writer and to the school of English letters in the University.—  
The Calcutta Review.





Like your Vice-Chancellor, I think it (*Studies in Spenser*) both valuable and well-written. Many a thesis, made in Europe with the advantage of access to great libraries, is far less to the purpose.....Mr. Bhattacharji's remarks on an old article of mine on Bruno.....naturally interest me. He also refers to Miss Winstanley's close study, published since then, of the same field. I think he is quite right in pointing out the further parallels on which I did not touch, between Bruno and Spenser; but whether these mean a definite *influence* is another matter.—Prof. O. Elton.

Devout Spensarians will welcome this evidence that their poet is sympathetically and profitably studied in the East as in the West. Mr. Mohinimohan Bhattacharji in his *Studies in Spenser* limits himself strictly to the tracing of some sources of Spenser's philosophy, especially of those related to Platonism, and performs his task usefully and with lucidity.....The chapter on Spenser and Bruno, wherein Mr. Bhattacharje joins issue with Dr. Oliver Elton, exemplifies once more the complexity of the subject and the difficulty of ascertaining the provenance of ideas and phrases. In the end much must remain a matter of opinion. We are glad to have Mr. Bhattacharji's, based on knowledge and thought. We would be even more glad to have a candid account of how Spenser's poetry strikes an Indian critic.—The Modern Language Review, April, 1930.